

-“Where are you, darling?” -“Here I am, darling!”:  
Call and Response as LGBTI Resistance Formation Before, During and After the Gezi Park  
Protests in Turkey

Ezgi Sarioglu, B.A.

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### Abstract

This social justice project examines the extent to which the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual (LGBTI) movement in Turkey has been affected by its participation in the Gezi Park protests that took place across Turkey in May, 2013. I argue that a dialectic process of organization and interaction took place between the protesters in Gezi, which I name *call and response*. This process opened up the possibilities for unexpected insights and changes in the LGBTI movement's strategies and dynamics. I draw on intersectional feminist theory to discuss the dynamics of the movement before, during, and after the protests, and I use textual materials such as news, magazine articles and interviews to examine the shifting views of different groups on LGBTI issues and the LGBTI community's reflections on Gezi's impact on the movement. My research is structured around in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five LGBTI Gezi protesters in Istanbul. My aim was to investigate how the LGBTI community is interpreting the influence of its 20 years of history on its Gezi experience and formulating new ways to seize upon the possibilities Gezi has opened up for the movement. I also explore key moments in the protests through five photos that highlight the significance of the LGBTI community's presence in those events. I draw upon my own experiences and observations both as an insider - as a member of the LGBTI community in Turkey, and as an outsider, a researcher currently residing in Canada - in order to complicate my findings. For the purpose of historicizing my results and drawing parallels and comparisons between similar movements, I juxtapose Gezi to the gay liberation movements in the U.S. and in South Africa. It is my hope that this study will open up new areas of discussion for social justice groups and organizations, and help in forming new possible strategies for the LGBTI movement in Turkey.

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## Introduction

### *Background and Context*

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May in 2013, a small group of social justice advocates set up tents in a park at the center of Istanbul, Turkey in order to stop the destruction of a city park by the Turkish government. The next day the police intervened and used pepper spray on protesters, and then more people, including one MP from the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and the VP of the Republican People's Party (CHP), came to the park to support and strengthen the protests and to prevent Caterpillar tractors from cutting down the trees. In response to the growing crowd, the police raided the park at 5 AM on the 29th while the protesters were sleeping; they used water cannons and tear gas to disperse the crowd, and they burned the protesters' tents to ensure they would not come back. Prime Minister (currently President)<sup>1</sup> Tayyip Erdogan addressed the protesters on the same day, and his declaration precipitated an unexpected public backlash that would become a turning point in Turkey's history:

Do whatever you want. We've made our decision, and we are going to implement it  
(Karataş, 2013).

Excessive police violence and Erdogan's speech disregarding the opinions of the protesters (along with the 50% of the population who did not vote for him) were only the most recent examples of the government's increasingly authoritarian stance. The protesters' strong determination to protect the park and the Turkish government's long-standing authoritarian attitude became a flash-point that brought millions of people across the country together and turned a small, peaceful demonstration into a nation-wide opposition and resistance movement against the government's dictatorship-like regime (Roux, 2013). Over the following weeks the

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<sup>1</sup> Erdogan served as the Prime Minister of Turkey from 2003 to 2014. He was elected as the President in 2014.

Gezi Park protests began to shift from a series of environmental demonstrations limited to one neighbourhood of Istanbul towards a collective movement that claimed social justice, equality and democracy in Turkey, sparking massive protests and riots in all parts of the country. While protests were wide-ranging, the epicenter of those protests and the focus of this thesis is the events that took place at Gezi Park, a small area of green space in the center of the city of Istanbul, Turkey that gave its name to the protest movement it inspired.

There are many aspects of the Gezi protest that make it a significant event, but arguably the most important measures of Gezi's success are the previously unimaginable alliances formed amongst oppressed groups that had been in conflict with each other before the protests. Not surprisingly, as one of the most persecuted minority groups in Turkey, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual (LGBTI) community was among the first groups that reacted to the destruction of the park. This community played an important role that began at the inception of the protests, so much so in fact that the rainbow flag became one of the symbols of Gezi (Egin, 2013).

Several authors (Navaro-Yashin, 2013; Zengin, 2013) write about the diversity of the protesters and discuss the significant effects of the LGBTI community's presence at Gezi. However, equally important to what this community brought to Gezi is what the LGBTI movement contributed as a result of its own experience and how the political dynamics of the LGBTI movement changed after Gezi. This thesis argues that the presence of the experienced LGBTI community as well as the spontaneous participation of the previously unorganized groups in Gezi started a dialectical interaction and organizational process, which I refer to as "call and response." This process generated what participants refer to as "the Gezi Spirit" which was materialized in the formation of coalitions within and between different political (and

apolitical) groups. Throughout this process, the dynamics of the LGBTI movement changed significantly so that in the words of LGBTI rights activist, Sedef Cakmak, “the Gezi incidents did in three weeks what we could [only] have achieved in three years (Yinanç, 2013). This thesis aims to investigate, from a social justice and equality perspective, the ways that the dialectical process of call and response made Gezi such an important turning point for the LGBTI movement in Turkey, and finally, to examine current and future strategies that activists and scholars may mobilize to open up additional beneficial discussions moving forward.

### *Exploring Gezi Through Call and Response*

The changing political and social environment in Turkey in the aftermath of Gezi is inarguably significant. The series of protests were relatively short, but they gave birth to long and complex discussions and changes for many groups and individuals in the country. The Gezi process, its reasons, motivations and implications are complex, so that it is difficult to examine them without a guiding lens. Several discussions about Gezi have privileged the spontaneity of the Gezi protests over the long-term experience of the activist communities in Turkey, such as the LGBTI and feminist movements. When I began this project, I initially wrote in opposition to this view by privileging the experienced activist communities, specifically the LGBTI experience. However, I came to realize the importance of a more intersectional lens that would enable me to explore these complexities in greater depth. Thus, I argue here that the Gezi protests deepened and amplified their impact because participants mobilized a dialectic process for organizing, which I have named *call and response*. Call-and-response is an African spiritual and artistic tradition of community participation process that relies on “spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speakers’ statements (‘calls’) are punctuated by expressions (‘response’) from the listener” (Smitherman, 1985, p.

104). In Gezi, various communities took part in a similar process and created a collective (hi)story in which each community was both the author and the reader simultaneously. This dialectic process built relationships between widely different groups and was the main tool that allowed protesters to learn about each other's experiences and to build a more broad-based movement. As my participant, Çiçek, suggests, each protester's call was heard by all groups "as if an amplifier was attached to everybody's voice," and accordingly, each call opened up possible connections based on the various responses it got. Sale's (1992) explanation of call-and-response resonates with the dialectic process in Gezi:

Because it is performative in nature and communally based, this kind of (hi)story depends upon the repeated interaction of the one and the many; recognition, authority, and responsibility for this (hi)story not only require but relish audience participation, the contributions of many tellers (writers) and listeners (readers) (p. 43).

As a political embodiment of call-and-response, Gezi's success also required and relished the participation of all communities of protesters; the repeated interactions between the communities gave birth to new understandings (calls), and each understanding produced new solidarities (responses). In the same way, each response often echoed a different call since the dialectical interaction was always in motion, and therefore every call and every response depended on the other. This same dialectic process set the pace of the change during and after Gezi; every call found a response, and each response multiplied the implications and built mutual relationships between the constituents.

The first protesters who went to Gezi Park to stop the destruction of the park produced a call, and more people responded by joining the protests. From the perspective of call and response, the protesters who joined Gezi after hearing these calls responded directly to those first



calls, while the first protesters needed the response in order to amplify their voices. From that moment on, the same call and response process guided the relationship between various groups in Gezi, and it shaped a complex set of relations in the protests. Throughout this thesis, I will argue that the history of the LGBTI resistance in Turkey was one crucial building block, amongst others, in moving towards an explosion point like Gezi: indeed, that explosion relied on multiple resistance histories. The spontaneity of the protests was based on long histories of informal organization, and that informal legacy contributed to a sense of spontaneity that made the protests stronger. The majority of the protesters, who were inexperienced in these kinds of confrontations, needed experienced activists, such as the LGBTI and feminist communities, in order to become involved in this struggle. Similarly, those who were experienced in social movements benefited from the response of the inexperienced groups in that they were forced to realize their insufficiencies, such as the inaccessibility of their political language, or the unintentional exclusion of people who identified with dominant cultures and/or ideologies. I will discuss this process in more detail in Chapter 3, Data Analysis, and develop my claims about the significance of this call and response relationship in contributing to protests that began inside the limits of Gezi Park but then became a mass movement.

### *Theoretical Foundations*

Intersectional feminist theory suggests, “oppression is not a singular process or a binary political relation, but is better understood as constituted by multiple, converging, or interwoven systems” (Carastathis, 2014, p. 304). A similar concept, interlocking oppressions, refers to a link between the systems of oppression such “that the systems are each other and that they give content to each other” (Razack, 2015, p.343). I mobilize intersectional feminist theory as the theoretical framework guiding my work, because the call and response process in Gezi finds

more meaning when discussed in conjunction with an understanding of the ways multiple groups of protesters' intersected in that space. In other words, multiple interwoven systems shaped the kinds of oppression experienced by marginalized groups who participated in Gezi. Participants became aware of the intersections of these systems through their involvement in the protests and these connections became a significant part of the dialectic relationship that made Gezi produce a unique moment in history.

Carastathis (2014) brings together work on intersectional feminist theory, and presents four main benefits of intersectional analysis over monistic approaches: simultaneity, complexity, irreducibility, and inclusivity. Simultaneity refers to the claim that oppressed identities are experienced simultaneously because of how tightly the systems of oppression are interwoven. For example, a lesbian Kurdish woman in Gezi would experience all three of her marginalized identities based on race, gender and sexual orientation simultaneously as she cannot choose to put aside any of these identities at any time. Accordingly, she would be experiencing oppression from three different, but connected directions, and so if divided, her struggle against these systems would require more time and energy. At this point, irreducibility gains importance as it suggests that oppression cannot be reduced to one foundational category because it "is produced through the interaction of multiple, decentered, and co-constitutive axes" (Carastathis, 2014, p. 308). Through this lens, the experiences of a lesbian Kurdish woman cannot be analyzed through centering one of her identity categories (such as race), as her struggle exists through three different interacting categories simultaneously. Accordingly, another benefit, complexity, attempts to reveal the "relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories" (McCall, as cited in Carastathis, 2014, p. 308), and it emphasizes that the experiences of the members of social groups are too complex to be analyzed as fixed identities. For example,

the same lesbian Kurdish woman could be involved in three identity-based social groups/movements and her experiences within and across each group would be shifting and complex, because each group would have different and changing dynamics, while [the ways she experiences] her identities and internal exclusions would also be fluid. Finally, inclusivity claims that intersectionality provides a way to resist oppressive and exclusionary discourses and constructions both within and outside social movements by “fostering deep political solidarity” (Hancock, as cited in Carastathis, 2014, p. 309). Perhaps it is this benefit that was the most salient in Gezi, because it was made visible as the concrete result while recognition of other three benefits among and within groups requires a closer and deeper investigation through (and as part of) the call and response framework. Throughout this thesis it is my aim to reveal these complex relationships and internal exclusions, and examine how the awareness of intersecting and interlocking systems of oppression in Gezi contributed to the formation of political coalitions within and between identity-based groups.

### *Personal Significance*

When the Gezi Park Protests started, I was preparing to leave Turkey a few months later to do my Master’s degree in Canada. One of the reasons I had decided to pursue my Master’s outside Turkey was my frustration with the never-ending conflicts between people who believed in different ideologies, and because I was exhausted by confrontations with a state that increased its despotism more and more each day. Many people around me shared the same desperation and none of us could see a way to change oppressive state structures. Even though I had been a part of the LGBTI movement for years, I felt trapped and helpless for a long time. Thus, at the outset of the Gezi protests, when hundreds of thousands of people around the country poured out into the streets and expressed what appeared to be shared feelings of frustration it took me a while to

comprehend the significance of the events. When more and more people from diverse ideologies and backgrounds joined the resistance, seemingly without fear, and were not deterred by excessive police violence, my frustration turned into hope and my exhaustion became determination. This activist hope and determination is infused into the scholarly arguments I make in this dissertation.

Before the protests, my research topic was completely different from what I am writing now. From the beginning of the protests until I left the country, Gezi became my life, and it changed me as a person, as well as my research interests. While some people claim that the Gezi Park protests failed, because the revolution did not happen as we expected, I remind them that the people who experienced Gezi opened countless new doors together. Having shared our experiences, many of us now see the media, the state and its institutions very differently and most of us are now aware of the ways those in power have justified their actions in order to maintain their privileges. I contend that the hundreds of thousands of people who participated in the Gezi protests were fundamentally changed by those experiences and that each of them carry the seeds of future revolutions that will happen slowly in Turkey. I am not alone in this belief. Even as I write this thesis, the general elections in June 2015, which Letsch and Traynor (2015) in *The Guardian* deemed as “tantamount to a cultural revolution in Turkish political life,” demonstrate that there has already been surprising changes in Turkey; the conservative ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), lost millions of voters as well as the parliamentary majority, and the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) which is seen as the outcome of the Gezi Park Protests gained more than 13% of the votes<sup>1</sup>. As a result of the elections, 96

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<sup>1</sup> Because AKP could not find a coalition partner, the elections were repeated in November 2015 amid instability and terror throughout the country, and AKP regained the parliamentary majority. Between June 2015 and November 2015 there has been two huge suicide bombings seemingly carried out by ISIS; the government ended the ceasefire with Kurdish fighters, and the economy

women will fill parliament's seats, while the Kurds will be represented with 80 seats, and 22 of the elected members of parliament promised to support LGBTI rights. In this thesis, I contribute to our understanding of how and why this 'cultural revolution' is happening by exploring the LGBTI movement before, during and after the Gezi Park Protests and assessing the new strategies and opportunities that Gezi has opened up for the movement.

### *Importance and Purpose of Study*

Most political groups and parties in Turkey tend to ignore LGBTI issues and/or forget about the existence of sexual minorities quickly. As the LGBTI movement gained visibility and recognition during and after the Gezi protests, the post-Gezi period may be a turning point for LGBTI rights. The more deeply the community's participation is investigated, the more their visibility will draw attention, and the more clearly their demand for equal rights will be heard. For example, only a decade ago, topics related to "the Kurdish problem" in the history of Turkey were taboo subjects, and they could not be discussed openly. However, because of the long and hard struggle of the Kurdish independence movement and the persistence of studies on this issue, the taboo has been broken, and the issue can at least be openly discussed. It cannot be denied that racism and prejudice against the Kurds in Turkey is still a prominent problem. However, the truce<sup>1</sup> made between the Turkish government and the Kurdish guerrillas in March 2013 after the 25 year-long civil war is an important indication of the success of the Kurdish independence movement. The work of scholars who had investigated this conflict for decades has now brought at least some of the problems to light. Academic studies examining the struggle of the LGBTI

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deteriorated significantly, all of which was commonly interpreted as Erdogan's strategic move to present the voters with a choice: "me, or chaos" (Henley, Shaheen & Letsch, 2015).

<sup>1</sup> Note that the political situation remains fluid. As of July 2015, the truce is over. According to many analysts (Arango & Yeginsu, 2015), Erdogan resumed the war after two years of peace as an attempt to regain parliamentary majority for the AKP by arousing nationalism amongst the Turks and delegitimizing HDP by associating the pro-Kurdish party with violence.

movement and its important involvement in Gezi contribute by providing historical reminders to other political groups of LGBTI participation in the public arena. They also assist the LGBTI movement in obtaining significant improvements in both the ruling and the opposition parties' political stances toward sexual minorities. Since homophobia and the exclusion of sexual minorities from social and political fields in Turkey have long been critical social justice issues of concern among human rights advocates (Bureau of Democracy: Human Rights and Labor, 2013), it is important to explore what the LGBTI community gained from Gezi as a movement. Just as some other LGBTI movements around the world guided some of the discussions in this thesis, understanding the pre and post-Gezi periods of the movement in Turkey will clarify the lessons LGBTI movements around the world can learn from each other. Understanding these improvements will open up new discussions regarding how the movement has been shaping its political strategies in Turkey in the post-Gezi period.

Because of its complexity, Gezi can be examined from many different perspectives and points of view. The books published and articles written on the protests discuss a large number of themes and topics, but, in general, the participation of the LGBTI community in the protests takes up a short paragraph. The LGBTI community is brought up briefly in one or two sentences or it is not mentioned at all in most works written on Gezi. Even the articles/books written on the LGBTI movement's Gezi experience generally focus on only one specific aspect of this involvement, such as discussing the visibility explosion of the LGBTI movement after Gezi, but not exploring its connection to the LGBTI resistance history. As a result, the significance of "Turkey's rainbow revolution" (Özlen, 2014) either gets lost among other political and social topics related to the protests, or it is explored with a limited scope. Even though each one of these works are important as they investigate a specific aspect of Gezi, it remains crucial to

examine various aspects simultaneously in order to bring the complexities of this “rainbow revolution” to light. As I was not able to identify scholarly work that combined various levels of analysis (i.e. the political and social history of the LGBTI resistance, Gezi Park’s significance as a queer space, the awareness created in the park through individual interactions, activism in the park, visibility during and after the protests) or analyzed the reasons and consequences of the LGBTI movement’s success on a deeper level, my thesis aims to contribute by filling this gap in scholarship. One of the strongest contributions of this research project will be to bring a range of common themes together to investigate the LGBTI movement’s involvement in Gezi. Additionally, by juxtaposing the similar, and in many important ways markedly different, experiences of the LGBTI movements in South Africa and the United States it will explore opportunities that may be beneficial for the movement in Turkey as well as bringing into relief qualities that distinguish the experience of Gezi historically.

### *Terminology*

To begin with, it might be noted that even though the Gezi Park Protests started in Istanbul and I conducted my interviews with LGBTI activists from Istanbul, I choose to use “Turkey” instead of “Istanbul” while talking about the LGBTI movement. The reason for this decision is that each region in Turkey has its own cultural and political dynamics, but all LGBTI organizations and groups work closely with each other and they organize meetings in different cities every year in order to evaluate the current situation and discuss new strategies for the movement together. Moreover, the Gezi Park Protests spread to almost all cities in Turkey, and many LGBTI activists were part of those protests in their own cities, resulting in the formation of countless local LGBTI organizations and groups all around the country. Since any changes in law apply to every region of Turkey, activists from each part contribute to the development of

the LGBTI movement in different ways, and all groups and organizations are part of the general movement as well as their local one. I acknowledge the local differences and the geographical limitations of my research, but I also believe that it would be exclusionary to attribute the developments in the movement only to Istanbul while discussing the LGBTI movement in Turkey. While the conflation of these two terms may appear to flatten out material geographies, I mobilize this terminology in order to reflect the imaginative geographies of the LGBTI community in Turkey, of which I remain a part.

*Gay liberation movement vs. lesbian and gay liberation movement:* I use “gay liberation movement” for the movement that started in New York after the Stonewall riots and “lesbian and gay liberation movement” for the one in South Africa as these were the most commonly used terms during the birth of these movements. Even though both of them are currently much more inclusive towards other gender and sexual identities in their use of terms/abbreviations, because I am referring to these examples to historicize the LGBTI presence in Gezi, the most proper use would be the ones used during the times of their emergence.

*LGBTI:* In most sources, it may be noticed that “LGBT” (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) is used for the movement in Turkey, while I have used “LGBTI” (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) in my research project. The movement used LGBT from the its emergence in the 90s. However, in the past few years the intersexual community has raised their voice louder, and both their existence and their problems have become more visible within the movement. A meeting was held on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April in 2013 in one of the most active LGBTI organizations in Istanbul, Lambdaistanbul, to discuss the problems of intersexual individuals--probably for the first time in the history of the movement (Lambdaistanbul, 2013). As a tangible effect of the “Gezi spirit,” this issue started being discussed more often during Gezi Park



platforms and in several different organizations. As a result, Lambdaistanbul announced that they would use LGBTI instead of LGBT from then on, apologizing to the intersexual community for not changing their use of the abbreviation earlier. Both because these discussions reflect the solidarity of Gezi, and also because I find it important to respect this inclusive decision, I have chosen to use "LGBTI" while talking about the community/movement both in Turkey and as a general term throughout this study.

*Gezi Spirit:* This is one of the most commonly discussed and studied terms linked to the Gezi Park protests. It defines an understanding of intersectionality that extended to the formation of previously unimaginable alliances between the protesters. Inceoglu (2013) explains that Gezi Spirit

...involves listening to one another, respecting each other's identity position, and working in solidarity. This awareness also leads citizens active in the forums to question the representative parliamentary system in Turkey.

My research investigates the possibilities and limits of this solidarity and understanding between different groups. Therefore, I used the term occasionally throughout my study.

*Kemalism:* It is quite difficult to explain this term in its entirety, because it is connected to a large number of social, cultural and political elements in the history of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. Briefly, it refers to the six main principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Turkish Republic. These principles established the official ideology and structure of the Turkish state: republicanism, statism, populism, laicism, nationalism, and reformism. These principles were "enumerated in the Republican People's Party (CHP) Statutes of 1935" and "incorporated in the constitution of 1937, which remained in effect until 1961, then only to be reformulated with slight modifications" (Tunçay, n.d.). These are the principles of

Kemalists who remained the ruling elite (Yeşilova, 2010) until recently, and these principles have been challenged, largely for the first time, during the AKP's rule. Kemalism had been the dominant ideology of the state, so these challenges are ostensibly why there was a high number of Kemalists in the protests even though they are generally considered to be a part of a previously apolitical sector of the population.

*Queer Space:* The term “queer” arose as an empowering reclamation of the derisive word meaning “odd, unusual, or haunting” used to define “anyone out of place in heteronormative society” (Jottrill, 2006, p. 360). While the political term “queer” can refer to anyone outside the norms of society, I use “queer space” to refer to a territory (re)claimed by (groups of) marginalized individuals to produce the possibility of safety, community, and/or a place to live within but outside the unwelcoming boundaries of the modern city.

### *Chapters*

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter reviews the current literature on the LGBTI movement in Turkey before, during and after the Gezi Park Protests as well as scholarly work on social movements and LGBTI activism in general. The second chapter discusses the methods I used in this thesis and explains my reasoning for the decisions regarding each of those methods. Chapter three includes the analysis of my collected data and discusses five common themes that emerged from the use of three methods. Chapter four concludes this thesis by briefly discussing the previous chapters and adds conclusive remarks and implications for each chapter.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

Every uprising, social or individual, leaves a permanent mark on the upriser (Ergüden, 2001). The Gezi Resistance is often considered one of the most significant uprisings in the history of the Turkish Republic. Gezi not only left a mark on the lives of the individuals who experienced it, but it also planted the seeds of a society that would begin discussing direct democracy (Özdek, 2013). Many political groups and parties changed their approach to a range of minoritized groups as a result of Gezi, and many oppressed groups found the opportunity to raise their voices and to be heard for the first time in their resistance history. Perhaps because LGBTI rights violations are amongst the most concerning human rights issues in Turkey (Amnesty International, 2013), one of the loudest voices heard during the Gezi Resistance rose from the LGBTI community. The LGBTI movement's involvement in Gezi and its social, political, and individual outcomes have been discussed from various perspectives. Scholars and commentators have explored the LGBTI movement's influence on the development of the protest, LGBTI visibility during Gezi, and interactions between the LGBTI community and other protester groups. On a broader level however, the current literature lacks a study that puts these aspects together and investigates the LGBTI movement throughout its experience before, during and after Gezi. In this sense, this thesis, and this literature review chapter in particular, can be seen as a project to collect the scattered chapters of a long, complex history in order to explore the larger story.

Some scholars argue that a literature review should cover only high quality articles and scholarly work. On the other hand, because the definition of "reliable" data is subjective, Ogawa and Malen (1991), in contrast, refer to Yin's two fundamental requirements of a literature review data: formal and retrievable (as cited in Ogawa and Malen, p. 280). According to Ogawa and

Malen's study method, as long as the data meets these requirements, even online memos or meeting minutes can be included in a research study. Accordingly, I did not restrict the selection of my literature review data to scholarly work. Apart from Ogawa and Malen's rationale, there are other reasons that affected my decision: (1) Although more and more studies are being conducted about the Gezi Park protests every day, there is still a lack of scholarly research specific to the involvement of the LGBTI community in Gezi; public media bridge this gap. (2) Some newspaper articles and interviews dating as far back as the beginning of the protests are as legitimate as some articles in academic journals, because public media was the fastest way to transfer information and discuss new opportunities during the sudden protests. (3) These documents were not written by outsiders who had limited knowledge of the issues; rather, they contain evaluations and discussions that emerged from the immediate experiences gained by activists who had the knowledge of insiders. (4) Because of the lack of research on this issue, legitimate information discussed in public media remain largely unrecognized by scholars, and it needs to be taken up and evaluated more aggressively. For these reasons, this literature review does not only include scholarly articles, but it also benefits from newspaper articles and interviews that are formal and retrievable. This literature review covers five key themes I identified while investigating current literature: (1) The previous political and social experience of the LGBTI resistance (Yinanç, 2013); (2) Gezi Park as a queer space (Firat, 2013); (3) individual interactions and the awareness of intersections of oppression in Gezi (Hüroğlu, 2013; Ararat, 2013); (4) Gezi as an educational field (Durgun, 2013); (5) LGBTI visibility during and after Gezi (Başdaş, 2013). These central themes shaped the direction of my research while I explored the reasons and outcomes of the Gezi Park protests for the LGBTI movement in Turkey.

Even though Turkey has complex political and social structures of its own, it is useful to investigate the Gezi Park protests, or any social movement, by juxtaposing them to other social movements that appear to have similar aims. In order to contextualize the Gezi incidents, I briefly investigate the lesbian and gay liberation movements in South Africa as well as the United States. Although the geographies and times of these two movements are considerably different, I find it beneficial to draw attention to both the similarities and the differences between these historical movements and the new era of the LGBTI movement in Turkey that started with Gezi. Since Gezi is a fairly recent incident, it is crucial for the LGBTI movement to use the fertility of the post-Gezi period to the best of its ability in order to create new opportunities for development. There are important lessons for the movement in Turkey to learn from other similar liberation movements in history. By revealing the parallels and contradictions between these movements I hope to present the LGBTI movement with the opportunity to discuss new strategies, and to open up new areas of research for scholars.

In section 1.1 The Previous Political and Social Experience of the LGBTI Resistance, I first look at how some authors made sense of the gay and lesbian liberation movements in the United States and South Africa by investigating the histories of these movements. I draw parallels between these movements and the LGBTI movement's history in Turkey, and I productively mark the ways that the Gezi experience differs. In the following four sections of the chapter, 1.2 Gezi Park as a Queer Space, 1.3 Individual Interactions and the Awareness of Intersections of Oppression in Gezi, 1.4 Gezi as an Educational Field, and 1.5 LGBTI Visibility During and After Gezi, I investigate some of the most prominent work on these topics. I place each theme in the broader scholarly literature and examine it through intersectional feminist theory in a call and response framework. While the works I examine from the broader literature

constitute important scholarly studies, the documents specifically on Gezi are shorter work retrieved from formal online newspapers or magazines. As I have pointed out, this work contains the freshest observations and discussions made by activists themselves, which created the basis for the later scholarly work on Gezi.

### *Previous Research on Gezi & Key Themes*

Current research introduces crucial elements that have formed a base for the changing nature of LGBTI politics after the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul. Firat (2013) emphasizes Gezi Park's importance as a queer space and discusses the park's history as a gay cruising area, while explaining the LGBTI community's unyielding involvement in the resistance with this specific connection to the park. Several authors (Ararat, 2013; Yinanç, 2013) investigate the LGBTI movement's previous resistance experience against state oppression, which had been going on for longer than two decades when the Gezi Park protests started. This work draws attention to the fact that the LGBTI movement's success in Gezi and the important improvements that came with it cannot be explained without focusing on the movement's 20 years of political and social struggle. Another theme that is commonly discussed by authors such as (Durgun, 2013) is the LGBTI community's individual interactions and communication with diverse groups in the park. Considering Turkey's complex history of conflict between groups with different ideologies, it was unusual for such a diverse crowd to share the same space in such spirited solidarity. This solidarity was shared between several groups and often explored in other contexts in connection with the larger success of Gezi. Durgun (2013) also points to communication without prejudice between protesters, and examines how the LGBTI movement seized the opportunity to do activism and use the park as a field of education. According to Durgun (2013), many groups began discussing the connection between patriarchy and different forms of oppression, and

awareness of LGBTI and women's issues increased among the protesters, and consequently a new, non-oppressive discourse was created as a result of the efforts of LGBTI and feminist activists. Finally, other authors (Başdaş, 2013) point to LGBTI visibility during and after the Gezi resistance, which I explore both as a reason and a result of the other themes that are mentioned above. In conclusion, these themes shaped the direction of my research -- they came up repeatedly in existing literature on the Gezi Protests, and my research participants also brought them up often during interviews that I conducted for this project.

### *1.1 Previous Political and Social Experience of the LGBTI Resistances*

#### *Homophile Movement and the Stonewall Riots*

The Stonewall riots are generally accepted as the emergence of the gay liberation movement in the United States; however, Poindexter (1997) argues otherwise by applying Morris' "indigenous framework"<sup>1</sup>, produced to explore the civil rights movement in the U.S., to the emergence of the gay rights movement. Informed by the indigenous approach, Poindexter explores the answer to the question "How then?" instead of "Why then?" while examining the development of the gay liberation movement. She suggests that a thorough exploration of the history of social action is critical for the empowerment of dominated groups. In order to emphasize the importance of the grassroots organizations before Stonewall for the emergence of the gay liberation movement, she first draws on Morris' critique of the three traditional social movements (i.e. collective behaviour theory; charismatic movements theory; and resource mobilization theory) that lack important characteristics of a social movement of which agents are the members of a dominated group. To illustrate, collective behaviour theory suggests that a

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<sup>1</sup> Morris' use of the word "indigenous" does not refer to native peoples of a place, but simply to the basic definition of the word.

social movement “arises in response to unusual situations” (Morris, 1984, p. 275), and therefore it is unstructured and spontaneous; the theory of charismatic movements suggests a leader who brings together a group of followers that demand changes in society. Resource mobilization theory explores the movements that are able to organize by managing existing resources provided by strong elites. Poindexter complicates the traditional historical analysis of the gay liberation movement, accepting the movement’s emergence as the Stonewall riots, in light of Morris’ critique of these three social movement theories. He draws attention to the importance of the organizational structures of pre-Stonewall communities by building on the characteristics of the indigenous framework.

According to Poindexter (1997), although the Stonewall riots seemed to be spontaneous, the circumstances that led to the incidents were not unusual. As supported by D’emilio (1983), urbanization and the post effects of the World War II brought gays and lesbians together, helping them to shape their individual and collective identities. Apart from clubs, bars, and bathhouses that formed the social basis of a gay and lesbian community, civil rights groups such as the Mattachine Society (founded in 1950), ONE, Inc. (1952) with an important monthly publication of ONE Magazine, and the first lesbian rights organization Daughters of Bilitis (1955) allowed some gays and lesbians to discuss their opinions, politics and everyday life difficulties concerning their identity, and to find ways to cope with these difficulties. Poindexter remarks that although these groups did not bring societal or political changes, they were crucial for the emergence of the modern gay liberation movement because the members of the community created networks and effective communication tools, and cultivated the idea of justice and coming out, which paved the way for a strong liberation movement.



According to D'emilio (1983), the underground gay and lesbian organizations of the 50s provided a foundation for the emergence of a fascination with gay life in literature, pornography, and media in the 60s, which led to more intolerance in conservative society and stricter law enforcements against homosexuality. Similarly, Poindexter emphasizes the harassment gay and lesbian community in the 60s suffered:

Police raids of gay bars were so frequent that they constituted business as usual. And the oppression and persecution of gay men and lesbians was commonplace and long standing (p 609).

This investigation of everyday persecution of the community and the history of oppression indicates that the U.S. Homophile Movement's resistance to the dominant power structures prior to Stonewall was crucial, and it strengthens Poindexter's claim that the Stonewall riots were indeed not a beginning, but a continuation of the community's long-standing struggle. She successfully demonstrates that without an already existing network of communication, an understanding of collective identity, and social, political and organizational structures, the police raid at the Stonewall Inn could not have produced a social movement. Therefore, the emergence of the modern gay rights movement after Stonewall "was possible only because of its strong psychological, social, organizational, and political bases" (p. 611).

Poindexter draws attention to other liberation movements of the 60s and their interactive effects to each other. She deems the interaction between various ideologies and political claims as "an essential condition for the gay and lesbian revolution" (p. 613); however, her exploration lacks a thorough analysis of the relationship between those movements, and does not mention a possible influence that the homophile movement may have had on other social movements. For example:

Black radicals talked about power, structural discrimination, systematic oppression, self-determination, liberation, community organizing, separateness, celebration of differences, and pride. Students talked of revolution, self-preservation, and idealism. The counterculture dealt with a politics of experience, celebrating the subjective, nonconformity, new personalities, ethics, and a new style of living. The women's movement talked of roles, sexual objectification, alienation, gender categories, and inequality. All the movements were highlighting civil rights, equal opportunity, and fair treatment (p. 613).

This paragraph represents the highlight of her analysis of the relationship between the gay liberation movement and other liberation movements at the time. She briefly names the issues, strategies, and politics of some other oppressed groups and suggests that gay men and lesbians learnt from the experiences of these communities. I would argue that a deeper investigation of the historical interactions between these groups and the homophile movement and the extent of the influences of these politics and ideologies would provide an opportunity to extend Poindexter's analysis to better understand intersecting and interlocking systems of oppression. Such an analysis would bring into relief the significance of building coalitions among dominated groups. Despite this limitation, Poindexter's work brings the struggles of the homophile movement to light, demonstrating the importance of its history of resistance and pointing to the influences other liberation movements had on the emergence of the modern gay and lesbian movement.

#### *Lesbian and Gay Liberation Movement in South Africa*

Historical, social and political divisions that are based on gender, class, race, ethnicity, etc. are tightly tied together in Turkey. As Carastathis (2014) emphasizes, the complexities of this

relationship between marginalized identities and the link between different systems of oppression make it difficult to reduce the focus of research to a centralized category even while discussing a specific marginalized community. In the same way, it is impossible to examine the history and recent improvements in the LGBTI movement in Turkey without touching upon the community's relationship/conflict with some other oppressed communities and its ability and/or failure to recognize these links. At this point, the South African lesbian and gay liberation movement presents an important historical example. To illustrate, Gevisser (1995) claims that, the South African lesbian and gay liberation movement cannot be investigated thoroughly without considering the country's "history of division and resistance:"

Apartheid legislated who we were, what work we could do, where we could live, who we could associate with, what we could read and see and what kind of sex we could have (p. 5).

Considering a system that overtly governed even the everyday lives of people in all areas, it would be useful for marginalized communities to notice how these structures intersected. Gevisser's investigation of the lesbian and gay liberation movement reveals that this awareness was not as salient as one might expect it to be and that the later, more unified movement learned from its failures. This experience demonstrates that the struggle of the lesbian and gay movement in South Africa was not a unilateral resistance, but "a defiance of the fixed identities –of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality" (p.5).

Gevisser (1995) remarks that just like the effects of urbanization in the post-World War II United States, migration from rural areas to the city centers during the 1920s and 1930s in South Africa started the establishment of personal and collective lesbian and gay identities. Despite negative stereotypes, harassment and discrimination against lesbian women and gay men, gay

subculture was strongly present in the big cities at bars, private parties, and public cruising areas such as parks, pools and bathhouses in the 1950s. However, white and coloured gay communities lived and socialized in separate areas and there was little interaction between them. Moreover, gay culture was mostly dominated by middle-class educated men, because working-class men and women had little space and economic independence to access gay life. Gevisser suggests that this white and middle-class dominated subculture would result in the establishment of a similar exclusive gay movement after the Forest Town Raid of 1966. As the literature on Turkey's LGBTI movement in Turkey will reveal in the next section, the same limited accessibility and independence would bring out conflicts within the movement during its first years of emergence (Yıldız, 2007). This parallel between the South African and Turkish movements exemplifies similar struggles of newly emerging LGBTI movements.

According to Gevisser, even though there had been countless police raids on gay parties and bars in South Africa, the 1966 raid was the largest and most publicized raid, probably because of the increasing attempts of the government to purify the "white civilization" by removing all threats to the race after the formalization of apartheid. Homosexuality was one of those threats that needed to be eliminated, and so with the Forest Town raid a stronger campaign against homosexuality was launched. Gevisser's detailed investigation of this history reveals that along with the 1966 raid, the 1967 anti-homosexuality bill proposal that aimed to criminalize both male and female homosexuality created panic among the homosexual communities. In response to this proposal, a small group of gay activists immediately came together under the name of the Homosexual Law Reform Fund in order to raise enough money to prepare evidence and lead the case against the new legislation. To raise the required money, more gay parties were organized and no matter what differences the community members had, they came together to

pitch in what they could. Gevisser makes an important observation by claiming that these actions could have turned into a strong liberation movement if the struggles of the coloured communities could be combined with these middle-class white dominated efforts. He explains this delay with several factors: there was a bias towards left-wing politics among the white communities; the authorities defined homosexuality as a white problem and ignored the existence of black homosexuals, making it hard for the coloured homosexuals to openly assert their identities, and an organized black homosexual community barely existed and had little connection with the white homosexual community. Instead, the white and middle-class gays and lesbians organized quietly without touching other important problems in the country, or making connections between their own oppression and the other marginalized identities, which produced limited success. Although it seemed like the group was successful on paper, three amendments to the law that raised the age of consent for homosexual act from 16 to 19, criminalized the use of dildos and any man-to-man action at a party that would “stimulate sexual passion” or “give sexual gratification” (p. 35) made the discrimination worse. Consequently a narrowly targeted focus on law reform collapsed. Gevisser also emphasizes that the white gay and lesbian community also failed to make connections between their experience of oppression and injustice and that faced by gays and lesbians of colour under apartheid. His investigation of the following two decades of gay and lesbian activism in South Africa reveals that it was this same failure that delayed the emergence of a strong and racially diverse movement. Failing to recognize any common grounds for resistance with the black liberation movement, as well as the importance of unifying with coloured gay men and lesbians, the white and middle-class lesbian and gay liberation movement isolated and weakened itself. Accordingly, as Gevisser argues, the main reason for Gay Association of South Africa’s (GASA) collapse was its effort to stay apolitical in

the 80s when it was impossible to do so, because the growing anti-apartheid and lesbian movements dominated the political landscape of the country. Not only did GASA try to remain apolitical, but white members were intolerant and unwelcoming towards black members, and so the black members resigned quickly after they joined the organization. One of the most important phases in the South African lesbian and gay liberation movement started when one of the previous black members of GASA, Simon Nkoli, and 21 other activists were arrested for treason after the formation of The Saturday Group in 1984. Being an open gay as well as an anti-apartheid activist, Nkoli became a hero and the symbol of both the gay and anti-apartheid movements among the Western civil rights organizations. GASA's apolitical stance towards Nkoli's arrest, and its reluctance to be involved in the anti-apartheid movement raised anger both from South African and international LGBTI rights activist, and caused the association to dissolve in 1986. Gevisser demonstrates that the lesbian and gay liberation movement learned from this failure and realized the importance of building coalitions among different movements and recognizing the intersections of oppression. As a result, more politically conscious and active organizations such as the black group, the Rand Gay Organization, and Lesbians and Gays Against Oppression were founded in 1986, folding "gay rights issues into the anti-apartheid struggle" (p. 58). Only then, Gevisser concludes, the political struggle of the lesbian and gay liberation movement gained more credibility among all members of the community, and started achieving concrete results in its fight for equality.

Gevisser's (1995) exploration of the South African lesbian and gay movement history successfully traces the roots of the gay counterculture back to the forging of the gay subculture. Through this detailed investigation of a decades-old white middle-class gay subculture and resistance, Gevisser reveals the causes of the failure of the first lesbian and gay organizations,

and effectively explains why the movement needed to start being more political and inclusive towards other oppressed identities. Because this thesis is guided by intersectional feminist approach, the South African lesbian and gay movement acts as a strong historical example for this study to demonstrate the significance of forging coalitions among liberation movements, and adopting an intersectional approach while fighting against oppression.

### *The LGBTI Movement in Turkey in 1980s*

Yıldız (2007) studies a series of books, articles, newspaper reports and interviews through three issues of *Kaos GL* Magazine in order to map out a detailed timeline of the LGBTI movement's history in Turkey. According to Yıldız, the need for an LGBTI formation was first mentioned by two celebrities at the end of the 1970s in Turkey, but this attempt failed because the talks were apolitical in their essence. At the same time, underground gay and trans clubs, movie theatres, bathhouses and parks were forming the basis of a gay culture (Selek, 2014), similar to the emergence of gay cultures in the U.S. and South Africa. Moreover, Ibrahim Eren who worked at the Izmir Environment and Health Organization started conversation sessions at his house with LGBTI individuals in Izmir (Geçim, 2004). However, violent conflicts between left and right political groups in Turkey led to the 12 September 1980 army coup, and these important LGBTI community developments were interrupted, commencing a nightmarish era especially for trans individuals and gay men. Yıldız presents several documents that reveal the cruelty the community was subjected to, especially in big cities at the time; trans women (and drag queens) were banned from performing on stage, their houses were burnt down, they were imprisoned, tortured, raped, and deported in trains in a Nazi-like fashion. This homophobic and transphobic ideology was perpetuated in the media even after the government was "restored." Discrimination against LGBTI individuals escalated, many people were "treated" by force at

mental institutions, and the community continued to suffer from the violent treatment of authorities even though homosexuality was not officially a crime.

Although Yıldız is successful in bringing various documents together from this troubling history, he attributes the emergence of liberation movements simply to the effects of industrialization and immigration from rural areas to city centers. He fails to draw any connection between the repression and persecution of the early 80s and the resistance movements that followed in the late 80s. It is crucial to mention that similar to the apartheid legislation that governed every aspect of life in South Africa and repressed several marginalized groups along with the black population, the ideology of the military during the coup also aimed to control every institution and establish a new system that adopted a repressive stance towards difference. Army generals blamed progressive leftist formations for the conflicts in the country and targeted them to eliminate the intellectual population, while depoliticizing the remnants of it (Özok, 2011). In order to interrupt the rise of liberationist movements, national integrity was reconstructed on a traditional ideology that combined the elements of militarism, nationalism, patriarchy and moderate religion (Akıncı, 2013). The LGBTI community in Turkey was by no means the only group whose newly-emerging liberation struggles and identity politics were violently interrupted; socialists, feminists, ethnic and religious minorities (especially Kurds) were also among those who were persecuted during and after the coup, and these were the groups whose resistance movements gained momentum afterwards. Although Yıldız overlooks this possibility, perhaps it was the saliency of this discrimination that made it possible for some movements, such as the feminist, Kurdish Independence and LGBTI movements, of the second half of the 80s to notice that there was a connection between their different struggles, and that the source of their persecution was based on similar ideologies. It is also important to mention that



many left-wing activists fled to Europe and the United States during the army coup and joined “anti-military, ecological and feminist groups, thus allowing them to gain insights into the new social movements” (Çetin, 2015). The effects of this mobility can be seen in Yıldız’s timeline where he mentions that Ibrahim Eren attempted to unify all marginalized communities under the Radical Democrat Green Party in 1985 after he returned from Italy. Similarly, in 1987, the Radical Democrat Green Party supported 37 trans individuals who started a hunger strike against police harassment. This strike gained national and international media coverage; several Turkish celebrities openly declared their support, and it became the first action the LGBTI community took to have their voice heard. At the same time, the LGBTI community was having weekly meetings organized by Ibrahim Eren. These meetings may have planted the first seeds of an understanding of the importance of solidarity and an awareness of intersectionality among members of the LGBTI community. This early understanding emerged almost at the same time as Turkey’s visible LGBTI movement and distinguishes the dynamics of the Turkish LGBTI movement from the lesbian and gay liberation movements in the U.S. and South Africa. To illustrate, while the early black and white gay activists had almost no connections and socialized separately for decades in South Africa (Gevisser, 1995), Kurdish and Turkish gay activists did both anti-racist and anti-homophobic politics together from the beginning, which made the Kurdish Independence movement one of the strongest and earliest allies of the LGBTI movement and vice versa. This is not to say that there were no conflicts or discussions within and among the groups. For example, the Kurdish Independence movement of the 70s and 80s was mainly based on Marxist ideas (Marcus, 2007). However, most socialist groups within which LGBTI individuals were active, perceived homosexuality as a product of capitalism and a result of Western influences, and they believed that once capitalism was defeated homosexuality

would be eliminated with it (Efendisiz, 1994). This prejudice may be the main reason that while several early LGBTI activists came from socialist backgrounds, the LGBTI movement leaned more towards anarchist ideologies and was often critical of socialism. It can be concluded from Yıldız and Çetin's historical documentation and analysis that even though there was not an organized, official LGBTI movement before the 90s, historical analysis of earlier decades was critical for understanding the contemporary movement.

#### *The LGBTI Movement in Turkey in 1990s*

In an issue of *Kaos GL Magazine*, Yıldız (2007) focuses on the LGBTI movement in the 90s, which is generally accepted as the beginning of the contemporary movement since the first attempt in the prior two decades could not produce any concrete organizations. According to the documents Yıldız brings together, at the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s a group of LGBTI individuals decided to form an organization in Istanbul, but this attempt failed because the constitutional draft that openly contained the word "homosexual" created dissent within the group. Finally, in 1992, the first LGBTI initiative, Gökkuşáğı '92 (Rainbow '92), was founded and its members started having meetings at a basement flat in Istanbul. An offer from the International Gay Group to co-organize the 1993 Christopher Street Day pride events in Istanbul resulted in a large meeting that brought together a representative of the International Gay Group Berlin, the members of Gökkuşáğı '92 and some other unorganized LGBTI individuals in Istanbul. Despite the fact that all events were planned and several speakers were already in the city, the Istanbul Governorship did not let this international gathering happen, because it was "against common societal values and norms" and it could "cause reactions that would threaten security" (Yıldız, 2007; Lambdaistanbul, n.d.). One year later, Lambdaistanbul, founded in 1993, is generally accepted as the first LGBTI organization in Turkey. The formation of

Lambdaistanbul would start the first productive discussions about what kind of organization the LGBTI community needed and what issues it wanted to fight for. Certain keywords stand out from these discussions about what an organization should NOT be. These keywords include “pro-system,” “mainstream,” “violence prone” and “hierarchical.” This list brings out another major difference between the South African lesbian and gay liberation movement and the LGBTI movement in Turkey: while the movement in South Africa tried to remain apolitical for a long time and was dependent on strong leadership, Turkey’s movement thrived on intersectional politics, and established itself as decentralized from the beginning. What is more, once Lambdaistanbul was founded and discussions in the community gained momentum, more LGBTI initiatives and smaller groups started being formed that would not allow a unilateral movement dominated by middle class gay men.

The foundation of Lambdaistanbul can be seen as the beginning of an organized LGBTI movement in Turkey. Thus, I find it beneficial to examine the following era through a combination of Yıldız’s (2007) work, which has a detailed timeline and testimonies of the activists, some issues of Kaos GL Magazine as historical documents, and Çetin’s (2015) analysis of the history of homosexuality and LGBTI organizing in Turkey. Yıldız demonstrates that another defining moment in the LGBTI movement’s history was a result of the disbandment of the Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission that was a sub-commission of the Human Rights Organization in Ankara. Some experienced activists from this commission published the first issue of the bimonthly Kaos GL Magazine in 1994 and later established one of Turkey’s most vital LGBTI organizations with the same name in Ankara. As Çetin points out, both Lambdaistanbul and Kaos GL consisted mostly of male activists, which highlighted the necessity of discussions about representational politics. These discussions led to the founding of the first

lesbian initiatives, Venüs'ün Kızkardeşleri (Sisters of Venus) in 1995 in Istanbul, and Sappho'nun Kızları (Sappho's Daughters) in 1998 in Ankara. These lesbian-feminist groups strengthened the intersectional politics of the movement. For example, a quick overview of Kaos GL's first issue's introduction finds a strong stance against sexism, heterosexism and generally hierarchical power structures. At the same time, an interview titled "KAOS GL nasıl bir dergi?" [What kind of a magazine is KAOS GL?] (1995) in the 11<sup>th</sup> issue reveals that although the movement was trying to strengthen its organizational structures and struggling with internal conflicts, some alliances with feminist and anarchist groups had already been established. For example, both gay and lesbian activists from Kaos GL and Venüs'ün Kızkardeşleri attended the International Women's Day rally on March 8, 1996 in order to support the feminist movement and demonstrate that the LGBTI movement could not be seen apart from the feminist movement.

Although they were short-lived and rarely mentioned in discussions about the LGBTI movement's history, Yıldız documents several other LGBTI groups and initiatives of the 90s, some of which are worth mentioning especially because they were founded outside the two largest cities (Istanbul and Ankara), such as Bilinçli Eşcinseller Topluluğu (1995) in Eskişehir, Lambda Erzurum in Erzurum (1996), Spartaküs (1997) in Bursa, and Biz GL (1997) in İzmir. The LGBTI movement, now with infrastructure throughout many parts of Turkey, used Kaos GL as a tool to open up and join discussions about various issues, from ways to improve the movement to religion, family, media, ecology, identity politics, anarchism, feminism, socialism, veganism, (anti)militarism, queer politics, international movements, etc. This information, knowledge and opinion exchange between the activists would guide the movement in becoming more and more community-focused and in developing a strong intersectional analysis. As Çetin remarks, even though individual and ideological differences among and within the groups

presented challenges, they did not prevent the initiatives from working together. For example, Yıldız demonstrates that Lambdaistanbul hosted a meeting with Kaos GL, Sappho'nun Kızları, Spartaküs and Türk Gay in 1998, and after long discussions the activists decided to have two annual gatherings, Bahar Ankara and Guztanbul, in order to exchange ideas about the movement's politics and the agendas of the LGBTI groups, discuss what the groups could do together, and inform each other about what they had been doing separately. Both Kaos GL magazine and these annual events served as a way to keep the activists in touch with each other as well as each other's specific local and organizational issues. A similar unifying development of the 90s was the establishment of Üniversitelerarası Lezbiyen ve Gey Topluluğu (Lesbian and Gay Inter-University Organization), in short LeGaTo. Founded by the students of Middle Eastern Technical University in 1996 in Ankara, LeGaTo aimed to bring LGBTI university students, graduates and academics around the country together (Gecim, 2004). LeGaTo's events and meetings opened up ways of communicating and they established social, political and academic discussions between university students, working as another domain that kept the members of the community informed about each other's local issues and politics.

Although many significant developments were achieved in the 90s by the LGBTI movement, both Çetin and Yıldız agree that discrimination and state harassment against LGBTI individuals was still highly prevalent and the movement faced internal challenges. For example, several LGBTI groups disbanded shortly after their establishment. Lambdaistanbul tried to organize a pride event for the second time in 1995, but the Istanbul Governorship banned it once again. Lambdaistanbul published the second LGBTI magazine of Turkey, %100 GL, in 1995 and broadcasted a radio program with the same name in 1996. While the first one failed because of low participation, the latter was banned by RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) after

1,5 years of broadcasting. The public media prosecutor sued Kaos GL Magazine for not sending the copies of the magazine to the authorities and for being “harmful” to minors in 1999, as a result of which the magazine lost its underground independence. It had to be sold wrapped in paper bag, and it was banned from being sold to minors in 2000. Finally, and most prominently, the authorities started “cleansing” operations as part of preparations for the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul, as a result of which the homeless, drug addicts, sex workers and trans individuals were violently driven out of the city center despite national and international protests. In summary, examining Çetin and Yıldız’s work as well as the earlier issues of Kaos GL Magazine reveals that the 1990s were fruitful for the LGBTI movement, but there were also various interior and exterior challenges to overcome.

#### *The LGBTI Movement in Turkey in 2000s*

Similar to the 1990s, Yıldız (2007) and Çetin’s (2015) works demonstrate that the last phase prior to the Gezi protests also presented both developments and challenges for the LGBTI movement. Yıldız’s documents indicate that the movement started focusing less on building a common group identity, and more on different LGBT experiences (intersexuality was not in the agenda at the time) and different organizational strategies at the Güztanbul and BaharAnkara gatherings in the 2000s. Another discussion was about the “hosts” (Lambdaistanbul and Kaos GL) and “guests” (all other representatives from various LGBTI groups and initiatives) of these gatherings and how a sense of distinctiveness prevented truly productive communication. This shift in the agenda is an indicator that once the LGBTI community came together under a common collective identity and common goals, the movement realized the need to produce and discuss a politics that considered individual and experiential differences as well as the importance of removing any organizational structures that might disturb the non-hierarchical

balance between groups. Another important event is the attendance of Kaos GL (in 2001) and Lambdaistanbul (in 2002) in the International Workers' Day rally. Yıldız presents a crucial call from Kaos GL for the rally in 2001, which refers to the identity differences within the members of the LGBTI community and similar systemic oppression against ethnic, cultural and sexual identities. Kaos GL calls the liberation movements to unify against the system with their different struggles. Moreover, the fact that LGBTI groups started attending International Women's Day and International Workers' Day rallies regularly around the country with their own banners, slogans and solidarity statements seems to be a strong indicator of the LGBTI movement's increasing emphasis on the intersections of oppression and alliances between marginalized groups. Yıldız also lists the issues that were brought up in a public statement that was signed by several LGBTI initiatives after the 9<sup>th</sup> Homosexual Gathering in 2003. Some of the issues discussed included removing harsh requirements for excusing gay men from their military duty (such as having to present photos while having anal sex with another man), including discrimination based on sexual orientation in the law, regulating the curriculum to remove sexual orientation discrimination in education, and securing the safety of trans individuals within law. According to Yıldız, this statement was considered to be one of the milestones in the history of the LGBTI movement. This public statement seems to be an indicator that apart from focusing more on solidarity between different movements, in the 2000s the LGBTI movement had also started making concrete claims regarding legal changes and it has started working towards achieving these goals.

Yıldız abruptly ends his review of the LGBTI movement's history in the 2000s after presenting these changes in the agenda and interior politics of the movement. Fortunately, with a focus on concrete legal developments and the establishment of official LGBTI associations,

Çetin's historical analysis fills in the blanks in the 2000s' timeline. Çetin remarks that thanks to the Turkish government's efforts to become a EU member, a new Law on Associations passed in 2004, allowing LGBTI groups and initiatives to be officially founded as associations. Following this development in 2005 several initiatives in several different cities became official associations. However, Çetin states that this new law did not indicate an improvement in the legal/political position of LGBTI rights as it became clear when the Justice Minister of the time, Cemil Çiçek, refused the LGBTI movement's request to include "sexual orientation and sexual identity" in the new Constitution. Furthermore, he points to the legal action taken against Lambdaistanbul in 2006 by the governor of Istanbul to ban the association "on grounds that it 'violated public morals and contravened Turkish family structures' and 'breached the Law on Associations.'" After a 3 year-long battle, which gained the LGBTI movement considerable national and international visibility and solidarity, the court ruled in favor of the association in 2009. In the same year, Siyah Pembe Üçgen İzmir faced legal action for the same reason and won the battle as well (LGBT Yaşam, n.d.). Despite these challenges, Çetin seems to be positive about the 2000s as he names the developments prior to Gezi as "mobilization, empowerment and acceptance" with a result in increased visibility and more strongly vocalized demands "in the health, labor and education sectors."

#### *The Implications of the LGBTI Movement's History on Gezi Experience*

Considering the sudden explosion of LGBTI visibility after Gezi, it is a common misconception that Gezi was the beginning of the LGBTI movement in Turkey. However, as demonstrated through the investigation of Poindexter's (1997) analysis of pre-Stonewall, and Gevisser's (1995) analysis of the lesbian and gay liberation movement in South Africa, it is essential to acknowledge the past struggles of an oppressed community and to understand the



foundations of a resistance movement in order to explore a social movement with all its complexities. The same significant connection becomes visible when the history of the LGBTI movement in Turkey is explored and linked to the achievements gained during and after Gezi.

Yinanç's (2013) interview with Sedef Çakmak, a LGBTI activist in Istanbul and currently a member of Beşiktaş Municipality Council, is important not only for being one of the first interviews that was published in the mainstream media about the LGBTI movement's participation in Gezi, but also for opening up discussions about the struggles and organization of the LGBTI community before Gezi. Yinanç's interview demonstrates that because of the long history of being subjected to oppression and violence, the community needed inclusive strategies and the ability to mobilize quickly for survival. Both these successful connections and the community's history of struggle made them one of the most organized, experienced and trusted groups resisting the police during the clashes. As Çakmak explains, these skills in resistance earned them recognition and support by the same groups that had had strong prejudices against those with marginalized sexual identities before Gezi. For example, while many socialist groups historically perceived homosexuality as a product of capitalist societies and their values, these views changed significantly after they witnessed the savvy resistance tactics of the LGBTI movement in Gezi (Tar, 2013). On the other hand, the community's already existing ties and networks with some other liberation movements, such as the feminist and Kurdish Independence movements, meant that the community already had strong alliances in Gezi. These alliances not only provided support and solidarity but also facilitated the success of Gezi. Furthermore, the well-organized structure of the LGBTI movement provided self-confidence and determination to its members who sought to actively take part in national politics as subjects representing themselves instead of being represented by politicians. Since the existing parties have

historically either ignored the existence of sexual minorities or barely touched upon their most crucial problems, taking an active stance in national politics was an important step. It is also interesting to note that at the time of Yinanç's interview, Sedef Çakmak was the chairperson of the Social Policies, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (SPoD) in Istanbul, and criticized the parliament for using the conservative nature of society as an excuse for their passive approach towards protecting LGBTI rights. Shortly after the interview she became the first open lesbian municipal assembly member in Turkey, actively working to improve the rights of sexual minorities and all oppressed groups in general.

Yinanç examines important aspects of the LGBTI movement's social and political history; however, he does not assess the significance of the longstanding legal struggle for LGBTI rights and protections in Turkey. Inequality in Turkish constitutional law and the mixed signals sent by politicians of the ruling conservative party about the value of protecting sexual minorities' rights exhausted the LGBTI community in Turkey, much like the discriminatory anti-homosexuality bill proposal and the changes in law in South Africa in the 60s and 70s. For example, the current President, Tayyip Erdoğan, stated in 2003, a year before he became the prime minister:

It is essential that LGBT's human rights be protected before the law (as cited in Krajeski, 2014).

However, throughout the years of his rule, several party members made statements claiming that homosexuality is a disease that should be cured or/and it is against public morality, Turkish culture and family structure. Like the movement in South Africa, the already exhausted LGBTI movement in Turkey decided to take a more active position in their struggle for a constitution that acknowledged the existence and rights of LGBTI individuals. They formed the group, The Rainbow Coalition Against Discrimination (Ayrımcılığa Karşı Gökkuşáğı Koalisyonu) in 2011,

which consisted of different LGBTI organizations around the country and aimed at direct change in the legislation. The effectiveness of the community's unique experience in Gezi led to the foundation of the LGBTI Political Representation and Participation Platform. It can be argued that without the LGBTI movement's already-strong foundation, the platform may not have been influential in national politics after the Gezi protests.

In conclusion, a careful examination of available literature demonstrates that the emergence of the gay liberation movement in the United States, the lesbian and gay liberation movement in South Africa, and the LGBTI movement in Turkey are tied to each other for one central reason. Each movement became determined to fight for their rights to take part in public life as a direct result of their long history of oppression and accumulated social and political experiences. The movements in South Africa and the USA have made significant gains in achieving their aims. Although it is too early to assume the same broad accomplishments for the LGBTI movement in Istanbul, the historical parallels between the three movements, which I will explore in more detail throughout this thesis, point to the importance of scholars and activists comparing and contrasting these movements in order for the LGBTI movement in Turkey to carry its Gezi success into concrete, long-term changes.

### *1.2 Gezi Park As a Queer Space*

As it can be observed in the histories of lesbian and gay liberation movements in the U.S. and South Africa (i.e. the police raid at the Stonewall Inn, and the 1966 police raid at the gay party in South Africa), the every-day struggles of an oppressed group can become an explosive resistance movement when a shared safe space is invaded by an oppressor. As Henaff and Strong (cited in Hou, 2010) suggest:

Public space means simultaneously: open to all, well known by all, and acknowledged by all... It stands in opposition to private space of special interests (pp. 2-3).

In the case of Gezi, a park, a public space accessible to everyone, was under threat of being turned into a private mall accessible to only those who could afford to be there. In response, diverse communities who were evidently fed up with state oppression and the increasing authoritarian stance of the government came together to oppose this transformation of public space. In other words, what was theirs was about to become someone else's and something had to be done about it. Hou's (2010) *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities* investigates the creation of alternative social and political spaces for oppressed groups when the public is under the constant attack of the private. According to Hou:

As places where important historical events tend to unfold, public spaces are imbued with important, collective meanings – both official and unofficial (2).

In other words, public spaces have their own political and social histories and characteristics that evolve in time, transforming the meaning of a space and creating new collective memories. Hou explores some of these collective memories and their significance by examining several alternative spaces created by different communities despite the strict scrutiny of the state.

Drawing on Hou's analysis, I suggest that though all three LGBTI communities in the United States, South Africa, and Turkey had long been oppressed both by the state and the general public, their movements exploded unexpectedly and gained momentum only when their safe spaces imbued with collective meanings were under attack. Because these alternative spaces (Stonewall Inn, Forest Town and Gezi Park) were where the communities could express themselves without being afraid, it was not only the space that was under attack, but also their

collective and individual identities. Losing these spaces would mean losing the meanings that had been created collectively over time.

To illustrate, Carter (2009) successfully documents a number of different texts written right after the Stonewall riots by the rioters themselves. It was repeatedly mentioned in these texts that although the riots were not planned, they did not start all of a sudden when the inn was raided by the police, but rather, they were the result of increasing anger against the police and state oppression after several gay bars had been closed down in the area. By bringing those documents together, Carter demonstrates that already invisibilized and swept away from the open public areas, LGBTI individuals had to create alternative socialization spaces for themselves, and when one of the most important of those spaces was invaded, the community reacted in order to protect their identity. In this sense, Gezi Park for the members of the LGBTI community in Istanbul was what Stonewall Inn was for homosexuals and drag queens in New York City: it symbolized a place of belonging. In order to articulate what Gezi Park specifically meant for the LGBTI community, I make reference to online blogs and/or magazine articles written by community members. The collective meanings created in the park were, in Hou's terms, "unofficial," because they remain unrecorded by scholars. By reviewing this literature here I also work to contribute to that collectivization process.

In his article "Bu Daha Başlangıç Mücadeleye Devam [This is Just the Beginning Fight On]" published in Kaos GL magazine, Fırat (2013) argues that LGBTI individuals in Istanbul are some of the most deeply wounded victims of the urban transformation project of the Turkish government. Several districts which the community had densely populated and where they socialized were recently "cleared" as part of the project. Gezi Park, situated in the entertainment district of the city, was a territory that gay and trans individuals used as a cruising and

socialization area especially at nights. Fırat indicates that one of the most common mottos of the LGBTI movement in Turkey is "not only gay ghettos, we want the whole city," and he effectively explains why the anger of losing even these ghettos, one by one, produced the motivation and the strong determination to take part in demonstrations for the LGBTI community. Gezi was a claim for equality for every group and individual that was present in the park, but for the LGBTI community, along with the street kids who slept in the park, it was also a crucial battle to defend one of the last safe spaces for survival. The rainbow flag, which was created in the gay liberation movement that started with the Stonewall riots in New York, was planted on top of every barricade in Istanbul during Gezi events as a symbol of the LGBTI movement's claim to take back their territory.

State oppression and privatization does not only invade private lives, but also the public spaces around the world, and as Kohn (2004) suggests:

When private spaces replace public gathering places, the opportunities for political conversation are diminished (p. 2).

However, as explored by both scholars and community members who examine Gezi, oppressed groups can also resist the destruction of public spaces and turn oppression into opportunities for political conversation and social change. Such resilience was demonstrated both during the Stonewall riots and the Gezi Park resistance. This is why scholars started to discuss and investigate the importance of the Stonewall Inn for the LGBTI community after the success of the gay liberation movement in the States. Accordingly, the significance of Gezi Park for one of its most common "residents" should no longer be a secret known only by the LGBTI community, but it needs to be revealed and discussed often and in greater depth while examining Gezi and the LGBTI movement's presence in the protests.

### *1.3 Individual Interactions and the Awareness of Intersections of Oppression in Gezi*

Systemic oppression does not operate through a singular process or structure, but rather through a complex, intertwined set of multiple categories of oppression that depend on and secure each other (Carastathis, 2014). Because differently marginalized identity categories are so closely intertwined and feed from each other, unilateral approaches to oppression miss the larger structure that enforces the marginalization of a group they are trying to liberate. By doing so, they not only end up maintaining the very system that causes their marginalization, but also reinforce the marginalization of other identity categories. For example, Crenshaw (1991) suggests that because of racist discourses that portray black communities as violent, some black critiques make the mistake of ignoring domestic violence within black homes as an internal family problem. However, to do so is to reinforce violence against women by not addressing it as part of a larger system of oppression. In the same way, Crenshaw explains, the failure to address racism and specific issues experienced by women of color within feminist discourses and communities leaves no choice for women of color but to deal with their race and gender issues, which are so closely tied to each other, inside their own communities and with limited resources. As an alternative to monistic approaches that block solidarity, Crenshaw offers an intersectional approach to systems of oppression. This approach addresses oppression as a construction of multiple, interwoven systems, it recognizes the experiences of those whose marginalization intersects at multiple structures of oppression, and it reveals the tight connection between the interlocking systems of oppression. It also empowers multiple marginalized communities by allowing for coalitions, rather than separation, between and within these communities. Epprecht

(2013) adopts this framework to investigate the connection between homophobia, transphobia, and other categories of oppression and suggests that:

To take a stand against homophobia is thus to take a stand for all people who suffer from discrimination or violence on other grounds, including by gender, ethnicity and nationality, but also by class and poverty (Epprecht, 2013, p. 47).

By revealing the relationship between different categories of oppression such as race, gender and class, and discussing how each privilege maintains the larger system of hierarchy, Epprecht demonstrates that focusing solely on rights for certain groups will not achieve real justice for all. I argue that what made the LGBTI community in Turkey during Gezi so significant was their awareness of intersections of oppression, which turned their focus to solidarity with one another. They demanded equal rights not only for the LGBTI community, but also for all minority groups that suffer from the same larger system. Considering the various groups that had previously been in strong conflict with each other, only a unifying, intersectional approach, as a practice, could produce the Gezi Spirit. It was this approach that united the protesters despite the divisive discourses of government officials, and it made Gezi a crucial success by planting the seeds of a just politics that started a discussion of direct democracy, regardless of the visible outcomes of Gezi.

Hüroğlu (2013) not only examines the resistance history of the LGBTI movement, but he also argues that twenty years of experience in social movement politics and consequent efforts to develop networks provided a foundation for the LGBTI community to both form solidarity with different groups during the protests and to gain trust and respect among the ones that had previously been against them. By emphasizing the LGBTI movement's contributions to the larger Gezi resistance, Hüroğlu demonstrates that this problem was overcome during Gezi, and



even though the LGBTI movement always tried to spread the same awareness amongst other oppressed groups even before Gezi, undeniable contributions to the resistance helped the LGBTI community's call to be heard and acknowledged for the first time. Collective memory is an important tool and it can be a transformative power for social change (Ararat, 2013). Hüröglü (2013) reminds us about this power by presenting the movement's already-existing political awareness of the intersections between different kinds of oppression such as racism, classism, ableism and heterosexism, and reveals that the LGBTI movement in Turkey had always been trying to build ties with other oppressed groups, a practice that echoes the definition of the Gezi Spirit.

The Gezi resistance was significant, then, because it brought various groups together in one place by providing a common ground and the opportunity for formerly disparate groups to listen to each other. The protests were not simply about resisting endlessly against the police; participants set up tents in the park and slept there and when the police burned their tents they stayed behind the barricades by turns, sometimes without getting any sleep for days. Not only the action of protesting, but also actionless moments during the resistance created an alternative, autonomous life in the park. It provided the opportunity for the protesters to interact with each other in a way that had not been possible before the protests. Ararat (2013) discusses the importance of this interaction for the LGBTI community and suggests that change comes with the ability to "touch" each other. LGBTI individuals who had long been vilified, marginalized and excluded from the public areas were in the park as themselves, which disrupted the ways they had been presented to the public by the mainstream media. As Ararat demonstrates, the community's ability to "touch" so many people directly and to challenge homophobic representations of sexual identity in the process was the main reason why the LGBTI movement

could achieve in a month more than they had in twenty years of struggle. Ararat's discussion is important, but he does not acknowledge that this achievement not only resulted from the fact that the LGBTI community was able to express themselves to others directly but also because the protestors in the park realized how the existing power relations oppressed these marginalized groups with different but interwoven discourses.

This literature review demonstrates that one of the most important outcomes of Gezi was an awareness created by the effort of some political groups, including the LGBTI and feminist movements, which stressed the importance of understanding the intersections of oppression and the need of uniting to stand strong against oppressors. However, while the autonomous life that was created all together taught people to listen to each other and live in the same space despite their differences and still-existing conflicts, it is also important to recognize that the prejudice against sexual minorities that had long been strongly present in society would not and could not be completely erased in a few months. Considering the similar history of the South African lesbian and gay liberation movement and the major success they gained in the years after the fall of the apartheid regime we can conclude that further study of the LGBTI presence in Gezi may have vital importance in the examination of the maintenance of these bonds and new networks, and the project of forming a broader solidarity and support for the LGBTI community in terms of gaining social justice in the long run.

#### *1.4 Gezi As an Educational Field*

In societies that are dominated and controlled by interwoven systems of oppression, we live surrounded by a countless number of illusions presented to us as reality by dominant ideologies. This control is so embedded in every aspect of our lives that it naturalizes oppression

and neither the privileged nor the oppressed groups can even imagine a possibility beyond the reality that is prevailed upon us. Freire (2005) calls these phenomena *limit situations*. Because of the dominant discourses that limit us, oppressed groups usually think that it is not possible to change the system on a vast scale. Freire argues that because the dominant ideology proposes only two opposite poles, the oppressed and the oppressor, the oppressed only fight to identify with their oppressors, even when they are intending to fight to change the situation. In effect they fight to become the oppressor. Freire's work stands out because he does not only delve into the source of the problem, but he also comes up with solutions to overcome these limit situations:

One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness.

Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (p. 51).

Because we are always in relationship with objects and other people around us, we constantly re-create the world we live in even without noticing. By first examining how the oppressive system is largely engraved in discourse, Freire successfully argues that possessing language means possessing power, and by recognizing how the oppressive discourse functions in our lives, we can take control and change the meaning to create new cultural, social, and political realities. He suggests questioning the meanings of words and themes, and our relationship with the objects around us in order to realize how we perceive the world through these created meanings, which he calls *conscientization*. By examining the power relations and the intersections of oppression through language, Freire proves that the awareness for one oppressed group alone cannot bring a

broader success, but active participants of the change should create dialogue and develop solidarity with each other to be liberated together.

Similarly, Pratt (2004) investigates the basis of domination and knowledge, and suggests an activism that deals with the constructions of hierarchy in real life rather than on a theoretical level. According to Pratt, definitions of “normal” and “the others” legitimize the creation of rules and regulations. In the end, domination does not operate through the state or laws, but through the normalization of discourses and societal control over those that are outside the lines drawn through the norms. Pratt’s work especially helps locate these structures of domination in daily life, and by doing so, gives these theoretical meanings a concrete embodiment in real life discourses and situations. Though she is working inside poststructural model, Pratt’s work both acknowledges Freire’s *limit situations* by exploring how oppression operates in discourses of daily life, and suggests *conscientization* by using this knowledge to bring concrete change. Since the interlocking systems of oppression are created by the dominant discourse to secure power relations, homophobia and transphobia are also connected to this larger structure and constituted by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression. By understanding discourse and its operation in every day life as a powerful tool for securing these intertwined systems, we can also understand why, before the Gezi Park protests, even various political groups that were against the ruling party had prejudices against the LGBTI community because of how they were presented by the mainstream media and the strongly embedded patriarchal discourses evident in culture and history.

Because of the long history of resistance and accumulated knowledge through activism, the LGBTI movement in Turkey had mostly been aware of these limit situations, in practice, and with how discourses of power work well before the Gezi Park protests began. However, several

other groups in Gezi were taking part in a political protest for the first time in their lives, and there were people who were unaware of these power relations – particularly their impact on LGBTI communities. To illustrate, Durgun (2013) observes that while swearing at the police during the first days of the resistance, some groups such as football fans and street kids used words like "faggot" or "whore" to swear, but as members of the feminist and/or LGBTI community were highly visible and would often challenge them and explain that these discourses were harmful to their solidarity. After a while, when these groups realized that they were standing shoulder to shoulder with "faggots" and "whores," they started noticing and apologizing when something homophobic, transphobic, or sexist slipped out. Durgun shows this uneasiness as an indicator of the significant change in opinion about the LGBTI individuals for those who participated in the protests. In his short work, Durgun does not simplify these achievements, but he attributes this success to the feminist and LGBTI activists. The feminist and LGBTI movements had close ties and communication with each other even before Gezi. They successfully (co)organized several meetings, workshops and film screenings in order to demonstrate everyday homophobia, transphobia and sexism, and to discuss the importance of challenging oppressive ideas and language through an intersectional feminist approach. Durgun's observations support Hüröğlu's (2013) claim that through these efforts the community was able to share ways to identify and challenge interconnected forms of oppression, and in a short period of time an alternative discourse was created collectively in Gezi. Therefore, feminists and LGBTI individuals in the park played a significant role in changing the dynamics of the demonstrations and creating a broader political consciousness that not only strengthened solidarity between the protesters, but also laid the foundations for potential future achievements in terms of gender equality and more rights for sexual minorities in the country.

As a result, despite the divisive speeches and discourses made by the government, and the difficulty of communicating with individuals coming from completely different backgrounds, the LGBTI movement's success was beyond expectations. The highly visible presence of the LGBTI community in the Gezi Park protests was at least partly responsible for this shift which prompted a conscientization process, which as Freire (2005) notes is central to achieving freedom:

We can legitimately say that in the process of oppression someone oppresses someone else; we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion liberate each other. (p. 133).

Freire's suggestion prefigures an intersectional feminist approach as it recognizes oppression as part of a larger system and solidarity as a necessity for liberation. While at the beginning of the Gezi protests the majority of the protesters were there to defend their individual rights, the protests achieved a lot more as they turned into a collective struggle for all groups' liberation. Central to my argument in this thesis, the Gezi resistance helped people realize the connection between different discourses of oppression, the importance of solidarity, and the power of acting together.

Consequently, it can be claimed that a process similar to Freire's conscientization helped different groups to understand the basis of oppressive discourses regarding gender, sex and sexualities, and by using the park as a field of education the LGBTI movement and the feminist activists contributed to one of the most significant achievements of Gezi. In addition to the relationships developed among different groups, sexist and homophobic discourses illustrated to

them the necessity of adopting an inclusive, well-thought-out politics to participate in the national political field, which also indicates the importance of further study about this issue.

### *1.5 LGBTI Visibility During and After Gezi*

In a system where the majority is accepted as the norm, and minorities are oppressed and/or seen as the other, it is important for social movements started by these oppressed groups to be visible in order for the community to be recognized. This recognition does not simply mean being acknowledged by the majority, but it comes with many different opportunities for movements. Currier (2012) succinctly explains these benefits in a few sentences:

Public visibility imbues them [social movements] with social and political relevance, enhancing activists' ability to disseminate their demands and ideas. Increasing a movement's visibility can enable activists to attract new recruits. Certain forms of public visibility afford movements credibility that improves their standing with audiences that activists want to influence (p. 1).

In other words, visibility provides a minority group with the ability to communicate their demands both in social and political fields; can render these demands credible; and draws new activists to the movement. In her exploration of the LGBT movements in Namibia and South Africa, Currier does not simply provide a background and/or talk about these movements' current organizing in detail; she analyses their strategies as well as their missed opportunities. As a result, her work does not only concern those who are interested in the LGBT organizing in Namibia and South Africa, but it also opens up important discussions for any new social movement that is engaging with the politics of in/visibility. Moreover, she does not insist on visibility; she also carefully examines the possible dangers that come from visibility, and the

benefits of intentional invisibility as it was adopted by these movements strategically according to their agendas. The LGBTI movement in Turkey is still enjoying the benefits and trying to seize the opportunities that come from the unexpected visibility gained after the Gezi Park protests, and even though this thesis is mostly concerned about this current visibility, it may also be important to briefly talk about and consider some other strategies that are explored by Currier, which can benefit the movement in the future.

The topic of in/visibility is a significant consideration when attempting to understand the effects of Gezi on the LGBTI movement. To illustrate, sexually marginalized groups in Turkey have been intentionally invisibilized by the state for decades. This erasure has not been limited to the ruling party that aimed to remove these groups from city centers all together with urban transformation projects, but was also evident in the majority of the political parties who either perpetuated homophobia and transphobia with their statements, or stayed silent and ignored the issues of the LGBTI community, claiming that there were more important problems to handle first. Despite activists' efforts to speak out and become visible, the LGBTI community had been subjected to severe discrimination and exclusion. However, since the inception of the Gezi Park protests, there has been an explosion of interest in the issues faced by LGBTI individuals and a tremendous amount of support for the movement both by political parties and by other movements dealing with different problems. Başdaş (2013) investigates this sudden change and claims that the LGBTI individuals who were on the front lines of the barricades defending their "territory" with rainbow flags made it impossible for anyone to ignore their existence. Her observations during the Gezi Park protests reveal that the community became more and more visible and well trusted as a result of their determined participation, and in the end they turned into "comrades" rather than "faggots" even for some of the most conservative groups in the Gezi



resistance. One important point that was emphasized by Başdaş is a commonly used cheer of the demonstrations, which was put forward by the LGBTI protesters, and also inspired the title of this thesis. Every time the LGBTI community shouted “*neredesin aşkım?*” (where are you, darling?) the crowd would yell back “*buradayım aşkım!*” (here I am, darling!). This exchange can be considered a revolutionary point in the history of the LGBTI movement in Turkey; for the first time, the community was not alone; instead, the backstreets of the city rang out with masculine football fan's supporting cheers for "faggots." Başdaş also highlights that the 2013 Istanbul Pride march was one of the most concrete results of this increasing visibility. The march attracted almost 100.000 participants, which was approximately 10 times more than the previous year's number. The pride march was supported by the collective participation of football fans, park platforms, student clubs, and several different political organizations and individuals, and the whole event went off under the close observation of the Turkish government, national and international media and opposition parties. These observations made by Başdaş are important in order to understand the extent of the visibility that the LGBTI movement gained during and after Gezi; however, because her article was written right after the protests, it could not include everything that was achieved in the past two years. To mention a few; several parties presented LGBTI pre-candidates for the municipal assembly in the local elections (Tahaoğlu, 2014); they formed LGBTI commissions working for the issues faced by the community (Etkin Haber Ajansı, 2013); discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was included for the first time in the preamble of the draft of the new Turkish constitution (Kaos GL, 2013); several municipalities signed LGBTI-friendly protocols (Çelik, 2014), implemented LGBTI training for their staff and hired LGBTI consultants (Tar, 2014). Considering the long history of

discrimination against LGBTI individuals, I argue that these shifts are a significant indicator of the impact of LGBTI visibility during Gezi.

This visibility was also crucial in helping the LGBTI movement grow tremendously after Gezi. For some queer critics, “visibility is a final result of LGBT activism” (as cited in Currier, 7), but it is too early to make this claim for the movement in Turkey, as there is still a long way to go in terms of achieving equal rights for the community. Along the way however, it is crucial to pay attention to the history of similar LGBTI movements in other parts of the world, as there might be new lessons to learn for the activists. For this reason, the movement needs more scholarly work that points to the dangers that may arise with visibility, like Currier’s study, while celebrating the recognition and opportunities that come with it, as Başdaş does, at the same time.

In this literature review, I firstly investigated the histories of the lesbian and gay liberation movements in the U.S. and in South Africa in order to historicize the LGBTI movement in Turkey. In the following sections, guided by these histories and an intersectional feminist approach, I examined the current literature on the four themes that shaped my research: Gezi Park as a Queer Space, Individual Interactions and the Awareness of Intersections of Oppression in Gezi, Gezi as an Educational Field, and LGBTI Visibility During and After Gezi. Because my data analysis sections are based on the recent history of the LGBTI movement in Turkey along with these main themes, the literature review chapter was intended to historicize and contextualize my analysis.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology and Design**

In this study, I make use of multiple qualitative methods in order to triangulate my findings and to investigate the following main research questions in a variety of ways:

- 1) How did the strategies that were adopted by the LGBTI movement and its experience before, during and after the Gezi Park protests affect the movement's political and social dynamics?
- 2) What are the opportunities and risks for the LGBTI movement in the aftermath of Gezi, and what are some strategies that may help the movement utilize these opportunities while minimizing the risks?

In order to respond to these questions, I used a three-prong approach to my research: i) I explored key visual representations of Gezi by examining photographs that were taken during the protests both by reporters and protesters, ii) I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with five LGBTI activists who took part in the protests in Istanbul, and iii) I engaged in self-reflective analysis in relationship to my participation in the protests as a part of the LGBTI community. My analysis of the selected Gezi photographs helped me discuss the five themes that guided my thesis through a visual lens, while the interviews helped me understand how the LGBTI activists perceive their experiences and where they see the LGBTI movement standing at this particular juncture. Moreover, having similar experiences both as a part of the LGBTI community and as a Gezi protestor, my self-reflective observations contributed to a stronger analysis of the photographs and interviews. I integrate these three methods into my analysis chapters in order to bring together different perspectives on the same theme. While the use of multiple qualitative methods helps me triangulate my findings and investigate my research questions in a variety of ways, the integration of the photographs, the interviews and my own

observations will contribute to a broader perception of the Gezi Park Protests and the changing dynamics and strategies of the LGBTI movement.

It is also important to mention the insider-outsider conflict that I experienced during this process as a result of my different positioning as researcher and LGBTI Gezi activist. Because I was a Gezi protester and a member of the LGBTI community in Turkey for many years, I was positioned as both an observer and researcher of my topic. However, my experiences in Istanbul as researcher while conducting my interviews led me to a new understanding of the fact that I had not been actively involved in the community or the LGBTI movement since I started working on my thesis in Canada two years ago. While I worked to maintain both positions before the interviews, the limitations I had to comply with in order to obtain ethics clearance, the unexpected answers I got from my interviewees, and my observations in Istanbul made me realize that it was impossible to position myself clearly as an insider subject of post-Gezi since I was no longer actively a part of it. I realized that I was more distant from my project than an insider, and paradoxically closer to it as the outsider/researcher. This conflict became evident when I had to deal with using a consistent pronoun and not shuttling back and forth between “we” and “they” while writing/talking about the LGBTI community and protesters. Because this change in how I position myself in regards to my research project has become a crucial aspect of my analysis, my self-reflective observations and experiences play a significant role in my thesis. This being the case, I examine the conflict in my insider/outsider status and its impacts as a part of my research. In fact, I believe acknowledging this conflict and working through it has enriched my analysis and overall observations.

### *2.1 Semi-structured Interviews*

Interviews are ways for participants to present "and discuss their perception and interpretation in regards to a given situation" and "it is their expression from their point of view" (Kajornboon, 2011). Therefore, I kept my questions open-ended in order to avoid directing my participants, and to give them more authority on the interpretation of their own experiences. Researchers should be flexible about the structure of their interview, and found it useful to have semi-structured questions that helped me get the interviews going when my participants were not sure about what kind of/ how much information they might share for the aim of the research study. Furthermore, since completely open-ended interviews may require the participants to share as much detail as they wish, it can be difficult for researchers to organize and analyze the collected data in comparison to a less open-ended structure (Turner, 2010), and therefore, keeping the structure of the interviews completely open-ended might have affected the quality of my overall data analysis. Consequently, I developed semi-structured questions for the interviews according to the common themes I identified during the literature review process. Depending on my participants' responses to the previous questions I asked follow-up questions, which helped me explore their personal experiences and points of view more in depth.

Due to the fact that the protests started abruptly, no group was organized for systematic action in the beginning, and people got together in the park individually. However, after only a few days, LGBTI organizations and individuals in Istanbul came together and formed a platform, LGBT Blok, to organize, communicate, and take part in the resistance as a collective group more efficiently. After a careful investigation of the online coverage of the LGBTI community in the Gezi Park resistance and the political developments about the LGBTI issues afterwards, I sent a letter of invitation by e-mail to several LGBTI organizations and groups in Istanbul whose

members were either a part of or had a close connection with the LGBT Blok. In my letter of invitation, I made clear that the potential participants would be selected among the Gezi Park protesters who identify as LGBTI, and asked if they could share the information in person through announcements at meetings, pin it on their bulletin boards, and spread the word around their networks informally.

Eventually, five LGBTI activists contacted me, and I had individual interviews with them in Istanbul in their choice of a private office where they would feel comfortable. During the interviews, I remained nondirective with my interaction with my participants in order to encourage them develop their own narrative so as not to mix their stories with my own. The interviews were audio-taped with the verbal consent of each participant to assure the accuracy of the information I gathered, and to make it more convenient for me to identify common themes and organize the collected data. In order to avoid risking the protection of the collected data while traveling, I transcribed the interviews and deleted the audio records before returning to Canada. After the transcription, each participant was given a copy of their transcript to review and make any changes as they saw necessary. The language that was used during the recruiting, verbal consent, and transcription processes was Turkish, and I translated only the relevant quotations that I used in my thesis into English. Through the interviews I was able to investigate the previous involvement of my participants in the LGBTI movement, if any, the formation of the LGBT Blok, how they participated in the resistance individually and collectively, their relations with other groups in the park, external reactions to their participation, and to what extent they thought all these developments have affected the LGBTI community, the movement's activism and the political agenda.

In some chapters, especially in the data analysis chapter, I use the statements of my interviewees not only as data that I analyze, but also as supporting sources for my arguments. There are two reasons why I chose to do that. Firstly, my insider/outside status in this study means that my participants have been, at certain times, objects of analysis, and at others, comrades with whom I carried out the same fight for years. Our shared experiences and intimate knowledge on some issues brought out similar points, making their statements valuable contributions to my own arguments. Secondly, as I bring up while discussing the limitations of my thesis project, there is a lack of scholarly work specifically on my research topic. This being the case, the data I gathered from my participants revealed a large amount of new information that has not been discussed yet. Consequently, the data my interviewees provided helped me fill the scholarly gap that currently exists in this area by presenting supportive points to my arguments.

### *Research Participants*

I find it beneficial to share some demographic data about my participants, such as age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and previous activism and involvement in the LGBTI movement, in order to consider the limitations of my research as well as how the subjectivities of my participants might have shaped their responses to a specific question. At the same time, I would also like to make it clear that even though this thesis aims to contribute to the current research as accurately and broadly as possible, by combining my analysis and interpretation of textual and visual sources as well as the stories and experiences of both my participants and my own, I recognize that individuals experience situations and express their identity in ways that are specific to their own contexts. Therefore, no individual or a group of individuals can represent an identity category, or the whole community that consists of complex structures and dynamics.

Therefore, my study stands as a partial view that must be set beside other studies that contribute to the knowledge of collective experiences of the LGBTI community in Turkey, Istanbul.

*Angelik* is a 32 year-old woman from Istanbul, and she identifies as lesbian. She has been a LGBTI activist in Lambdaistanbul since the first half of the 2000s, and she has also been active in the feminist movement since then. Previously, she organized in Marxist-socialist groups, and she mentioned that this background was an important reason behind the delay in her interest and involvement in identity politics.

*Çiçek* is a 40 year-old woman from Rize, residing in Istanbul, and she identifies as bisexual. She has been a Lambdaistanbul activist since the mid 90s, and she first got involved in the initiative as a result of her interest in writing for the Lambdaistanbul magazine, %100 GL.

*E-bear* is a 40 year-old Kurdish gay man residing in Istanbul. He is one of the pioneers of the Bear movement<sup>1</sup> in Turkey since the second half of the 90s. He stated that he had previously been involved in the Kurdish Independence movement and this background helped him realize his sexual identity and the need to fight for LGBTI issues. He is currently an activist in Istanbul Bears.

*Seda* is a 32 year-old bisexual woman from Ankara, residing in Istanbul. She remarked that although she had organized in several NGOs since she was a teenager, the non-hierarchical/non-centralized structure of Lambdaistanbul attracted her and she got involved in the initiative in the first half of the 2000s. She has been an activist in SPoD (Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association) since its foundation in 2011.

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction of the Bear movement is a good example of the LGBTI movement's strong emphasis on agency while doing identity politics. In E-bear's words, the Bear movement distinguished itself to challenge the effeminate-dominant gay movement and to make masculine gay men more visible within the movement.



*TransBlok* is a 40 year-old trans woman from Istanbul, and she identifies as pansexual. She stated that her organized resistance against the system started when she moved to Ülker Sokak, one of the major Istanbul ghettos that the government “cleansed” where trans women, sex workers, ethnic minorities used to reside at the beginning of the 90s. Since then she has been involved in organizations working for sex worker and trans rights, and raising awareness about HIV/AIDS. She is currently involved in the organizing of the group Trans Blok.

## 2.2 Photo Analysis

As one of the LGBTI Gezi protesters and a close observer of the protests, I know that during and after the Gezi Park protests it was easy for protesters to show what they needed and demanded to the media and politicians, because they were the ones watching every step of the protests closely. The hardest part was communicating what Gezi really meant for us to the non-protester public, amongst whom were our best friends and family members, because all they were seeing were the images of protesters destroying property and throwing rocks at the police. No matter how lively and strong the Gezi experience was for us, our words were powerless against the strength of those images since words are generally perceived as less reliable against visual “proof.” According to a study conducted by Mendelson and Darling-Wolf (as cited in Jensen and Smith, 2014):

While photographs or text by itself may have negative impact on viewers because they are not receiving the full story, photographs and text viewed/read simultaneously were able to challenge cultural stereotypes that viewers previously held (p. 11).

In other words, when a narrative comes together with a photograph, the message the storyteller tries to convey becomes more powerful. Additionally, the freedom the internet provided in

sharing information through both images and stories has probably had one of the strongest effects against the limited information the people were able to get from the media during Gezi. Here stereotypes against the protesters and views about several political issues were effectively challenged by photo stories, and I decided to use these images in my own analysis about Gezi. I highlight alternative photographs that reflect a side of the protests ignored by the “violent” images that have been repeatedly used by mainstream media. By visualizing the themes that were brought up often by my interview participants I strengthen their narratives as well as my own analysis.

My experiences in the past two years in Canada while discussing the Gezi Park protests led me realize that it was difficult to understand the extent of the protests in a space where the culture and politics were completely different from Turkey. Whenever I presented a visual representation of the protests to my audience, our discussions shifted to a deeper level. As a result, I realized that describing my findings in detail and analyzing my interviews without a visual representation might not present the incidents in their entirety to a certain audience.

Mendelson and Darling-Wolf (cited in Jensen and Smith, 2014) explain that:

A photo story folds over space and time, over the course of pages, with varying amounts/sizes of text and pictures. In addition, unlike a television news story, a photo story offers the possibility of return, reexamination, and/or consideration of earlier portions of the narrative (p. 16).

When a photograph comes together with a narrative, it conveys experiences and emotions through time and place. Even when similar photo stories are brought out by different subjects and reflect different and/or conflicting points of view, photos that come together with narratives provide the viewer/reader the opportunity to compare and contrast those standpoints independent

from the source. I analyze my interviews in juxtaposition with related photographs in the same chapter rather than analyzing the photos separately. In this way, I aim to provide a more complete picture to my thesis audience, and to make it easier to go back and reexamine the previous narratives that came out of Gezi for future research.

### *2.3 Self-reflective Observations & the Insider/Outsider Conflict*

Some critics doubt the legitimacy of autoethnographic observations, and question the issue of self-representation while conducting a research study (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). Some scholars even claim that in a research study, “the proper voice is no voice at all” (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997, p. 194). This standpoint is described as “scientific imperialism” by Pathak (2010), who criticizes this position for considering the research as valid only if it does not have the voice of the researcher. He suggests that this “colonial” view creates a false binary of knowledge that is “either of the body (experiential/anecdotal) or of the mind (intellectual/abstracted theoretical)” (p. 3), and invisibilizes the political positioning of the (frequently) white male researcher. As a result, while the knowledge produced by colonialist and/or white male scholars is validated as impartial, the validity of the embodied knowledge of scholars of color, woman and LGBT scholars is questioned.

Not only was I part of the LGBTI movement in Turkey as an open activist for years, but I also participated in the Gezi Park protests in two different cities (Istanbul and Izmir) with the LGBTI community. Given my intimate connections, it would be misleading to use only interviews and visual materials as my research method, as if I had no connection with the community or the protests. Moreover, the elision of my experiences would result in the loss of an insider’s view. Therefore, I made use of self-reflective observations as an additional method to

aid me during this project, which helped me understand my interviewees and my own positioning in regards to the current LGBTI movement. Furthermore, integration of all three methods during the data analysis process led to a better understanding of the themes as each method supported the others by reflecting a different side of an issue. I define my observations as ‘an additional method’ for two different reasons. First of all, the fact that I was not part of the LGBTI community after Gezi positions me as an observer who has significant knowledge prior to that period. Secondly, most of my experiences as an LGBTI activist before and during the Gezi Park protests are geographically exclusive to Izmir, where I lived during my involvement in the community. While these time and space differences may present some limitations, they also provide significant unanticipated insights, which I will discuss for the rest of this section.

Because of my years of involvement in the LGBTI community and my participation in the protests even after leaving Turkey, I had never doubted my ties with the movement. I had considered myself an insider to this issue until I went back to Turkey and conducted my interviews. Perhaps one of the most personal and eye-opening findings of my research was the realization that despite my confidence as a past LGBTI-Gezi protester, I was not an insider to my own research topic two years later. While I was collecting my data in Istanbul, some members of the community showed an unexpected uneasiness about my research; I was only one of so many scholars/reporters who had been discussing, examining, and writing about the connection between the LGBTI movement and Gezi. This uneasiness was understandable considering that several politicians and authors had previously attributed the post-Gezi achievements of the movement simply to the effects of Gezi, ignoring the bitter history of LGBTI resistance and the movement’s decades of struggle pre-Gezi, which made those achievements possible. However, apart from validating my own similar concerns about the erasure of LGBTI resistance pre-Gezi,

this cautious response from the community marked my first insider/outsider conflict; as the members perceived me as an outsider/researcher rather than a part of the community. During my interviews, I came to realize that no matter how hard I tried to keep in touch with the LGBTI issues through my research, news and online blogs, I was not a part of the post-Gezi experiences of the community. While I can speak confidently about my observations in the LGBTI movement before and during the protests, I cannot claim insider knowledge of the post-Gezi period more than anyone who read related news from a distance. Even though my past involvements in the movement gave me the chance to understand and analyze my findings thoroughly and to make important connections between pre and post-Gezi, it would be more accurate to consider my experiences post-Gezi and during the interviews after the protests as the observations of an outsider rather than of an insider. While this change in my positioning made me uncomfortable as a previous LGBTI activist, not being involved in the LGBTI movement after Gezi gave me the opportunity to see the changes in the movement more clearly and catch little details that could have been missed otherwise.

There is another important point to mention about my involvement in the LGBTI movement and the Gezi protests: I did not join the resistance that was in Gezi Park until two weeks after it started. From the beginning, however, I was actively involved in the protests in Izmir, where I was enrolled in my undergraduate degree. It is a common misconception that the Gezi Park protests started and stayed in Taksim, Istanbul. In fact, as soon as the police violence showed itself in Gezi, millions of protesters poured out into the streets, not only in Istanbul, but also in many other cities in Turkey. I believe that many protesters are also uncomfortable about the fact that Gezi is a widely studied topic, but most scholars do not even mention any other

cities than Istanbul. Right before we started the interview, one of my interviewees, Seda, voiced her discomfort about this issue:

Everybody talks about Istanbul, but more important things happened in other cities. There are so many new local LGBTI groups and organizations everywhere. Please talk about this in your thesis.

I promised her I would, and as an activist, must honour that promise. I explained that my questions pointed to the achievements in other cities as well. In the case of Gezi, I believe there is a tendency to study the most visible from top to bottom, and to overlook many other crucial details and facts hidden in the “background,” such as discussing the LGBTI presence in Gezi, but not discussing past activism, or setting the focus on Istanbul, but not mentioning other protest cities. At the same time, my study also focuses specifically on Gezi/Istanbul, because conducting interviews in several cities and exploring the protests in their entirety throughout the country would be a significant challenge for a master’s project. In other words, as a scholar, I must clearly define my project geographically, and I do; however, as a social justice activist, I am compelled to make my readers aware of the national impact of the Gezi protests. For that reason, there are some facts I would like to mention.

The reason why the Gezi resistance is commonly mentioned as the most significant unrest in Turkey’s history is because it spread into almost all parts of the country rapidly. Since I experienced the protests both in Istanbul and Izmir, I can safely say that the incidents were quite similar in both cities; the protesters occupied the parks, set up their tents, created open libraries and medical service points, gave out free food and drinks, and resisted the police violence at the barricades. People stood together, listened to each other, and showed incredible solidarity in both cities. Stories we have heard from our friends and read in social media about the protests in some other cities also echoed a similar picture. Because the same environment could be observed in

several cities during the protests, when the name “Gezi” is mentioned people generally refer to the whole incidents, not only to the resistance in Gezi Park/Istanbul. Furthermore, as I mentioned previously, the LGBTI groups and organizations in Turkey try to keep in contact and update each other on local issues through several annual gatherings and communication tools so that the LGBTI movement can stay united and grow stronger through multiple branches. Thus while my study investigates the Gezi protests and the improvements for the LGBTI movement in Istanbul, the reflections above are important to keep in mind while considering the experiences of Turkey’s LGBTI movement before, during and after the Gezi Park protests.

#### *2.4 Data Analysis*

Once I gathered the data together, I re-evaluated common themes and made note of unexpected findings during the interviews and my observations in Istanbul. I focused on how each participant responded to the same questions, identified the consistencies and differences, and investigated the connections and relationships between their responses, while considering their different subjectivities. Apart from five common themes, I organized the data in three time periods for a well-organized analysis: the LGBTI movement before, during and after the Gezi Park protests. After coding, I analyzed the data through an intersectional feminist framework, with an understanding of how systems of power operate at the intersections of multiple and conflicting forms of oppression and how interlocking oppressions co-constitute each other. Because each intersecting category of victimization is experienced simultaneously and is connected to a major system of oppression, reducing a social justice problem to the discussion of one central category gives us a limited perspective, simplifies complex lived experiences, and makes it difficult to build coalitions within and between identity-based groups. Based on the

significance of emphasizing these relationships, I decided that an intersectional feminist framework would be most fitting to investigate the Gezi Park protests, which united millions of people who had been victimized in different ways because of major systems of oppression, and provided them the opportunity to recognize and work through the intersections of domination.

As I mentioned above, I combined three different methods during the analysis in order to investigate the themes meaningfully and offer a more complete picture of the issues. While I recognize that neither my self-reflective observations nor the opinions of my research participants can represent the experiences and views of the LGBTI community or a particular identity as a whole, the combination of my participants' responses, my observations and the photographs provided a significant understanding of the LGBTI movement before, during and after the Gezi Park protests, and articulates how the members of the community make sense of their experiences of the changes that followed Gezi.

### *2.5 Limitations & Ethical Imperialism*

The limitations I faced while conducting my research can be discussed under five main categories: 1) time and material limitations; 2) methodological constraints; 3) sociopolitical constraints; 4) institutional limitations, and 5) geographical limitations. To begin with, one of the most significant limitations of my study results from the fact that the events I have been investigating are fairly recent, still in progress, and therefore, their implications are ambiguous. As mentioned above, the recent nature of my research topic results in a lack of written material with which I could strengthen my arguments and analysis. It was difficult to find scholarly data specifically on the involvement of the LGBTI community in the Gezi Park protests, making it more challenging to combine different kinds of data to come to a conclusion for my research



questions. Moreover, as the effects of the protests in political and social fields are yet to be seen, my conclusion may not present a definite result, but rather reflect the experiences and dynamics of a group of LGBTI activists at this point in the post-Gezi period.

When a minority group is researched or interviewed for any reason, participants may have some legitimate concerns and questions. What is the aim of the research or interview? To whom is the study going to serve? Will the sensitive information be exploited by the researcher, or actually used to contribute to social change? What discourse will be adopted in the process of data analysis? Because discourse has the power to distort reality (Freire, 2005), and the LGBTI community in Turkey has experienced this kind of distortion many times, I hoped that my background as a LGBTI activist would play an important and positive role in developing trust and confidence with my participants both as a researcher and a part of the community. On the other hand, I find Rowling's (as cited in Pearce, 2010) recommendation to maintain "emphatic distance" useful, which requires the researcher to stand neither too distant nor too close to their participants while conducting interviews. Considering that intimacy is highly valued in Turkey's culture, my background as a LGBTI activist, and my own involvement in the protests as a part of the LGBTI community, keeping an emphatic distance was one of the challenges I experienced. As Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2001) argue:

The desire to participate in a research study depends upon a participant's willingness to share his or her experience (p. 93).

Therefore, while I find it important to maintain a necessary distance with the research participants, it was also crucial for me to reassure my participants that their opinions mattered and to keep them interested and eager to participate in the project. I knew that too much distance might cost me my participants' eagerness to share their stories if they took my distance as a sign

of indifference. Consequently, I needed to position myself carefully without being offensive, or creating an environment that might reduce the desire of my interview participants to be a part of my research. Although this methodological standpoint was not a crucial limitation, it still posed a challenge while I was conducting my interviews.

Furthermore, sociopolitical constraints came into play because there is a conflict between my different identities; I am conducting this research at a white-dominated, Western institution in English, but I was born and raised, and had been involved in the LGBTI community along with other political issues in Turkey for many years. Academic imperialism does not only value Western knowledge above “the others” (Pathak, 2010), but through ethical imperialism, it also ignores the differences between the West and the rest of the world, assuming that the same rules and values are valid for everywhere else (Donaldson, 1996). Similarly, the cultural, social and political structures of Turkey and Canada are significantly different from each other, but my education as a researcher at a Western institution does not take these kinds of differences into account. As a result, for this project to be conducted successfully and as beneficially as possible for the LGBTI movement in Turkey, I tried to remain aware of the academic imperialism implicit in this frame, and to find a balance between my intellectual/academic voice and my intimate relationship with the community I have been strongly connected to for a long time. My experience with the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB) was one of the most concrete examples of academic/ethical imperialism, and it produced particular kinds of limitations to my research design. For those reasons, I discuss my experience briefly in the following section.

#### *The Research Ethics Board’s Confidentiality Limitations and Their Implications*

Ruttan (2004) argues:

The process of picking our way between the expectations of research institutions, our personal values, and the collective interests of research communities can be complex (p. 12).

The complexity Ruttan refers to results from the fact that as researchers, we all have particular identities and opinions that may be different from and/or in conflict with what is expected from us by research institutions and may constrain what we aim to contribute to a specific research community. I would suggest that such conflicts are especially salient in the context of social justice scholarship that works to balance scholarly and activist aims. Facilitating these complex interests, and juggling my different identities as a researcher and an LGBTI activist became more difficult as a result of the limitations I faced during the REB approval process. After I applied for ethics clearance, I had to respond to pages of questions, as well as to defend my project in person in front of the ethics board. Such a process is certainly understandable since my geographically distant research topic may be unfamiliar to most of the board members. However, at the end of the process I felt that most of my responses and efforts had been disregarded, because of the fact that I had to make several problematic changes in the way I conducted my interviews. I acknowledge that this cautious approach could be necessary and beneficial for a research project for which the main data is collected in Canada, but they were detrimental for my project in particular as they did not consider the significant cultural, political and social differences between Canada and Turkey. I believe this was an important limitation that had an influence on my research, as I will discuss with more examples.

Most notably, while dealing with confidentiality, I knew that some of my participants might have concerns about their identity being revealed, which is perfectly understandable considering the possibility of discrimination and oppression against sexual minorities in Turkey.

On the other hand, as a past activist of the LGBTI movement, I know from experience that it is important for the LGBTI community and its activists to be open and visible as a part of the movement's struggle, because coming out/owning your identity as a LGBTI individual is seen as crucial for the development of the movement. The movement is aware that coming out may cause serious challenges for some individuals and treats it as a personal choice that should concern only the individual; however, the crucial importance of visibility for the community has generated a strict principle that only publicly open activists should give interviews. Because both considerations are legitimate for their own reasons, I believed it was my ethical responsibility to give my participants the option to decide whether they wished to disclose or conceal their identity in my original application for the ethics approval. I aimed to ensure privacy for the participants who might have concerns about revealing their identity, while at the same time respecting the principles of the community and the decision of the participants who might wish to maintain their political standing and activism by openly discussing their experiences both with their identity as protesters and members of the LGBTI community. In the end, all LGBTI activists and/or protesters who participated in Gezi were aware of the risks they were taking, and they willingly took part in the resistance both during the protests and in their everyday life. Moreover, as only publicly open members of the LGBTI groups/organizations volunteer to give interviews when there is a request, several mainstream media reporters would most likely have already interviewed my potential participants. Therefore, disclosing their identity in my thesis according to my participants' own choice would not have caused more risks than they have already willingly taken, and it would also position me as an ethical researcher within that community.

Apart from these points, Article 10.4 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 of Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2010) explicitly states:

If failing to identify participants would be unethical because of any disrespect it would represent, or if informed participants assert their desire to be named, then researchers should do so, according to the practices of their discipline (p. 143),

The statement advises REBs to be sensitive regarding this topic. I understand that the REB was concerned about the safety of my participants. However, the clear advice of Article 10.4 of the TCPS 2 supported my own responsibilities and ethical concerns that not enabling identity disclosure for a community that has specific principles on the issue would be unethical and disrespectful. Although I argued that, as a Social Justice and Equity Studies MA student, political activism was the main motivation and goal of this research, the committee determined that the possible risks would be more serious than the potential benefits, adding that my interviewees would be participating in a research study and their involvement would not be based on political activism. Although I sincerely agree that REBs should be careful to ensure the safety of research participants, I am critical of the REB's decision, because I believe it was ethical imperialism that led the REB to ignore the values of the LGBTI community in Turkey and the different political and social environment of the country. This ethical imperialism resulted in negative outcomes both for my research participants and me.

When I informed my participants about the requirement to choose a pseudonym for the interview, all five of them were strictly opposed to it and expressed their wish to use their real names. Fortunately, none of them withdrew from the research project even though they made their uneasiness clear about having to hide their identity. In direct opposition to the REB process

and order to maintain their politics and open identity, two participants picked pseudonyms (*E-bear* and *Trans Blok*) by which the community would know them and that made clear reference to their political standing. The process of trying to collect data in the most beneficial way for my research and to respect the values of the LGBTI community at the same time, despite the changes I had to make due to the REB's concerns, became one of the most challenging tasks while conducting my research.

Moreover, there were geographical limitations which also stemmed from the fact that I was studying an event that happened in Turkey while I was a part of an institution as a researcher in Canada. These limitations were amplified because of institutional constraints. Firstly, I was on a tight schedule while arranging all required documents and permissions for my institution before I left the country for data collection, as well as during my time in Istanbul for the interviews. In addition to geographical and time constraints, the Research Ethics Board (REB) did not allow me to contact the activists over the internet personally because of security concerns. I believe this constraint was overcautious since there has not historically been any incidents where the Turkish government breached the right of privacy in order to catch protesters by hacking into e-mail accounts, which was what the REB was concerned about. Consequently, I did not have the opportunity to choose my participants individually, which took away the possibility of interviewing a more diverse group of participants who might have reflected a wider range of experiences in the movement. For example, since I was on a tight schedule and I was restricted to contacting only the LGBTI organizations by email, all the groups I ended up contacting had been a part of the movement for many years. All my participants were within a close age range and they had been LGBTI activists before Gezi. Even though I gathered data about the new activism in the movement as much as I could through the interviews with my

participants, my findings still lack first-hand experiences and opinions of activists who joined the movement after their involvement in the protests.

In sum, the ethics clearance process proved to be an important challenge for my research as my struggle to find a balance between my identity as a researcher and as an LGBTI activist became more difficult since I was positioned against the politics and principles of the LGBTI movement from the very beginning, and the combination of geographical and institutional limitations ended up affecting my interview data. These conflicts even brought me to the point of considering whether to abandon my research project altogether, or to find another method of data collection. In the end, I decided that the benefits of exploring the experiences of the LGBTI protesters and the new strategies of the movement were too significant to leave out the interviews. Unfortunately, the fact remains that I was forced to violate the principles and the politics of the community I had been a part of for years in order to carry on with my research, and a significant gap in knowledge about new LGBTI recruits during and after the Gezi protests remains to be filled.

## *2.6 Conclusion*

Overall, even though the limitations I faced during the ethics process were significant, I make a strong argument in this thesis that successfully expands our understanding and contributes in valuable ways to discussions about the participation of the LGBTI community in Gezi Park protests and the implications of that participation for the LGBTI community. One of the crucial strengths of this research is the fact that it contextualizes several themes that had previously been discussed separately, as well as examining those themes through multiple research methods that I have explained in this chapter in detail. While the interviews I conducted

helped me delve into the experiences and perceptions of the LGBTI activists and examine their participation in the protests, the photographs provided a visual lens to my participants' narratives. Furthermore, my own experiences and observations as a LGBTI Gezi protester enriched my overall approach and analysis of the data. In the following chapter, I will bring these methods together to start analyzing my data under the first common theme I identified: previous political and social experience of the LGBTI resistance.



### **Chapter 3: Data Analysis**

In each section of this chapter, I first analyze the interviews I conducted with five LGBTI activists in Istanbul with a focus on the particular theme of that section. I ordered those themes according to three time periods of the LGBTI movement: before, during and after the Gezi Park protests. Accordingly, the first two sections, 3.1 Previous political and social experience of the LGBTI resistance, and 3.2 Gezi Park as a queer space, discuss the experiences of the LGBTI movement prior to the protests. The following two sections, 3.3 Individual interactions and the awareness of intersections of oppression in Gezi, and 3.4 Gezi as an educational field, investigate the LGBTI community's experiences during the protests. Finally, the last section, 3.5 LGBTI visibility during and after Gezi and its implications, examines how the history of the LGBTI organizing and the activism in Gezi brought out concrete results after the protests. This time order is useful in order to observe the progression of the incidents and the LGBTI movement as a whole. At the same time, it should be noted that I did not draw a strict line between the time periods and made some connections and references between them as needed because the incidents and the experiences of the movement are interactive, fluid and sometimes simultaneous.

While analyzing the interviews, I consider the consistencies and differences between the responses of my participants regarding similar issues, and I examine their relationship with the post-Gezi period of the LGBTI movement. Both during data collection and the analysis processes of the interviews, I remained aware of the change in my positioning as it gave me a chance to observe and interpret my participants' responses both intimately from a LGBTI-Gezi activist's point of view, and also closely from an outsider's critical standpoint. In related sections, I discuss the call and response process and the extent to which it acted as a factor in

bringing out change. In some sections, I use several quotes from only some of my interview participants and leave out the others, because given the open structure of my interviews, each participant provided more significant data on particular issues. Secondly, I provide a photograph that is related to the specific theme and I interpret how it reflects and/or contradicts the narratives of my participants. I chose the photographs carefully so that they would make an original contribution to the discussion of the issues while still representing the theme from a variety of angles successfully. Finally, in each section I present my own observations as an LGBTI activist before, during and after the Gezi protests in conversation with the previous discussions. While I divide these three methods into different parts in some sections, I implement them in some other sections when the methods exemplify and/or support an important point more efficiently together.

Along with my observations and the literature I reviewed, the responses of my participants often referred to the unity and solidarity between the protesters and its unexpected implications following Gezi. I found consensus among my participants that protesters had created this unity collectively as a result of their understanding of the connection between different systems of oppression, and the realization that only a strong coalition between marginalized groups could be truly effective against the larger system that feeds related forms of oppression. For this reason, an intersectional feminist framework that approaches oppression as a complex and interwoven process constructed by multiple systems (Carastathis, 2014) is useful for assessing the impact of the Gezi protests. Accordingly, throughout all three methods of data analysis, I considered the intersections of oppression, I examined answers to questions about how the LGBTI movement has approached this issue since the beginning of the 90s, and I considered whether or not this approach has had a negative or positive effect on the aims of the

movement. Finally, I recognized that the Gezi Spirit, a notion identified repeatedly by protesters, my participants, and alternative media, accelerated the success that the LGBTI movement had been trying to achieve for years.

### 3.1 Previous Political and Social Experience of the LGBTI Resistance

As I argue above, the Gezi Resistance should not be seen as the beginning of the LGBTI movement, but rather as the result of a decades-long struggle by activists. In order to thoroughly investigate the achievements of the movement during and after Gezi, we first need to take the roots of this movement into account and discuss what may have led it to such success after the resistance. In order to do that, I consider how my participants interpreted their previous ties with the movement, if any, and whether they associated the current success of the movement with these previous efforts or not. Additionally, my past involvement in the movement as an activist and my first-hand experiences regarding the LGBTI movement's history of resistance gave me an insider's knowledge and ability to interpret the data in greater depth. In this section, I use two photographs of the same scene, which reflect different points of view regarding this theme. The photographs are interesting, because although they do not seem to be relevant to the theme at first, they make sense when they are analyzed in juxtaposition with the other data.

#### *3.1.1 Interviews*

##### *LGBTI existence & bodily resistance*

I started the interviews by asking my participants how long they had been in the LGBTI movement and what they had been doing since then. Not surprisingly, most of them said that even before they got involved with the movement they had been resisting the state and its

institutions on an individual level. One of my participants, Trans Blok, made an important point: “I’m a trans woman; my battle probably started when I was three years old or so.” It is striking that one can feel like they have been in a “battle” with the system as early as three, but indeed, the struggle of LGBTI individuals starts very early; firstly at home, then at school, in social life, and while trying to find a job. Because Trans Block was identified as being outside the gender norms of the wider society, her body itself was a battlefield from the beginning. This being the case, while some LGBTI individuals have to live some or most of their lives secretly in order to protect themselves, others find themselves in organized movements, both in order to feel that they belong somewhere and to gain equal rights. In this way, my participants seemed to support Butler’s notion that (2002):

Even as I think that gaining recognition for one’s status as a sexual minority is a difficult task within reigning discourses of law, politics, and language, I continue to consider it a necessity for survival (Preface, xxvi).

Because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, my participants had been outside the norms of the system and societal requirements. They lacked the basic rights that were provided to the majority and therefore they engaged in the difficult struggle to gain recognition and equal rights despite the dominant discourses that worked to marginalize them. Accordingly, when I asked what motivated him to be involved in the LGBTI movement, E-bear responded:

If I am this way, and if we are the outsiders in this society, you notice the situation as soon as you discover yourself, you notice that you’re an outsider. I believed that I should defend my existence, I should make it visible, I should work for it.

I will emphasize the word “existence” here. If one’s existence itself is outside everything the dominant system stands for, that struggle becomes a battle to exist, or in Butler’s words, “a necessity for survival.” Furthermore, while defending their existence, some individuals can pose

a serious threat to the system and its institutions. For example, the disruptive nature of mere trans existence can be perceived as an attack on the patriarchal system. No matter how the individual identifies or expresses themselves, arguably, the “in-betweenness” of their identity breaks the strict lines of the heterosexist values, and it creates a gender outside the safe lines of the binary system (Bornstein, 1994). This situation positions the individual against the hierarchical binary of the patriarchy on which the system is built, and the mere existence of the individual becomes a declaration of war. When I asked about her motivation to be involved in the LGBTI movement, Trans Blok explained this bodily resistance, or from a different standpoint, the existential attack, with these words:

I was against something. I was extremely disturbing some people with my existence because this is a Penis Republic... This is a country where penis is worshipped, both by women and men. This is the Mecca of being with a penis, having a penis, of its power. And you stand in front of people whose culture and country are built on this thing, you say ‘this has no value to me’ and you get it cut. It throws some people off balance because all their lives, power, ideologies are built on this.

Probably because the trans existence is one of the most direct and clear “attacks” on patriarchy, violence against trans individuals in Turkey is especially serious. The law protects the system rather than individuals, so it does not provide equal rights or even the protection of basic rights and safety for these individuals. In direct support for my argument in this thesis, that the success of the spontaneous protest at Gezi depended on a deep organizational history, my participants articulated that ways that being organized in the movement becomes a necessity for survival rather than a choice for most open LGBTI individuals.

#### *The implications of the history of organized LGBTI resistance for Gezi*

Individual resistance transforms into organized resistance; however, the level of the threat to the system increases, because being organized is not only about resisting, it is also about

demanding. The organized struggle of the LGBTI movement dates back to the beginning of the 1990s, and since then there have been several physical and juridical attacks on LGBTI groups and organizations; people gathered outside their organization buildings, threatening the safety of the individuals, and some organizations went through legal battles that ordered their closure. Despite every threat and attack, the LGBTI movement kept resisting, and they have always sought ways to strengthen themselves. But how, specifically, is this bodily and organized history of resistance related to the Gezi Park protests?

As I write this thesis, it has been only two years since the Gezi Park protests happened, but there have already been countless articles written on several aspects of the events. Most of the scholarly work on Gezi seems to focus on the spontaneous, unstructured, and irrational nature of the protests that emerged as a reaction to a specific situation (Altıok-Karşıyaka & Yıldırım, 2013). Trans Blok seems to be in agreement with this view:

The matter for me and for the first ten people in there [Gezi] was to protect the trees. Our motivation was environmental.

From this point of view, the spontaneous reaction to a specific situation does make it seem that Gezi was constituted by a series of unorganized events. I concede that on one level, LGBTI individuals became involved in the protests as a sudden reaction, just like the rest of the crowd. However, I also argue that the assumption that LGBTI involvement was purely spontaneous would result in missing several significant points. Even though the original inception of Gezi was an environmental protest started by a small group of activists, its full importance can only be seen when it turned into a civil rights movement within the space of a few days. My argument is that, the LGBTI community and other experienced activists, most importantly, feminists and Kurds, contributed significantly to this small environmental demonstration to transform it into a collective action for social justice, and the community's success came not only as a result of its

efforts in Gezi, but also because of its resistance history. The spontaneous demonstrations were the first call for all protesters, but the contributions of the already organized movements, such as the feminist movement and LGBTI movement, were the response Gezi needed in order to become a collective rights movement. This call and response relationship indicates that it would be difficult for a collective rights movement to emerge in Gezi without a spontaneous inception, while in the same way it would not be possible for a small environmental demonstration to turn into a crucial point in history without an organized structure. Therefore, organization and spontaneity depended on each other and worked effectively together in generating what can be considered as the most significant collective rights movement in Turkey's history.

Before I delve deeper into my interviews and in order to exemplify why and how the LGBTI presence in Gezi differed from the presence of most other protest groups, I find it beneficial to draw a parallel between the movement in Turkey before and after Gezi, and the movement in the U.S. before and after Stonewall. In both cases they appeared to be a sudden, unforeseen explosion. Both the Stonewall riot and the involvement of the LGBTI community in Gezi seemed like a spontaneous reaction at first; however, neither the police raid of a gay bar, such as Stonewall Inn, nor the state violence, such as in Gezi Park, were unusual for these communities, unlike for most of other Gezi protesters who emerged from previously apolitical backgrounds. I say most protesters, because although there were some other minoritized groups (i.e. feminists, ethnic and religious minorities) present in the park, the majority of the crowd had never been actively involved in politics before. To illustrate, one research study demonstrated that 78.9% of the Gezi protesters were not affiliated with a political party or a NGO (Tekinalp, 2016). Unlike these inexperienced groups, the activists of the marginalized communities had a long history of resistance and an understanding of the larger systems of oppression. At this point,

it is significant to emphasize that many members of the LGBTI community have been marginalized due to multiple systems of oppression, and therefore they have long been resisting at these intersections. For example, four of my participants out of five mentioned that they had been activists in different movements before they got involved in the LGBTI movement: E-bear was an advocate of the Kurdish independence movement; Angelik was a socialist; Trans Blok advocated for sex workers' rights, and although Seda did not specify the issues, she stated that she volunteered for several NGOs. Naturally, they had a broader understanding of intersecting systems of oppression as they had been oppressed due to multiple identities and the fact that they got involved in the LGBTI movement did not mean they stopped advocating for other issues. Consequently, we can assume that many LGBTI activists in Gezi had a relationship with other experienced movements, and they had also been a part of those movements, and vice versa. While Seda and E-bear mentioned how their past involvements with other movements led them to the LGBTI movement and prepared them for their intersectional activism there, Angelik's experience was different. She came from a socialist background that did not consider LGBTI issues as part of the larger problem, but rather a consequence of the problem. Her previous political position claimed that eliminating capitalism would eliminate homosexuality as well, thus, Angelik kept her distance from identity politics until she decided to leave the socialist group(s) she had been a part of and joined the LGBTI movement. Her example, while anecdotal, signifies the importance of doing intersectional politics. While movements that adopt this approach and its associated practices as a fundamental part of its politics become part of a larger and stronger alliance, those that centralize rigidly around a particular category miss the connections between intersecting systems of oppression and end up losing some of their members. They remain at a distance from coalitions that could otherwise empower their



movements and politics. The importance of investigating the LGBTI resistance before Gezi comes into play at this point; I submit that it is this history, the resistance experience and the first-hand understanding of intersections of oppression that made the LGBTI community stand out among the crowd in Gezi, making them one of the most prominent groups that were present in the park. In fact, my interviewees also pointed out the history of the LGBTI resistance, and why and how it contributed to their achievements during and after Gezi. For example, one of my interviewees presents the significance of this past:

Because you don't trust your police, you don't trust your public prosecutor, you don't trust your landlord, you don't trust your mom, you don't trust your dad, who are you gonna trust? You trust your friends who are like you. You turn to them first when something happens to you. The very reason why we could take part in Gezi in such an organized way was this communication and solidarity network that we had (Seda).

Seda's point substantiates my argument: the experience of police violence and/or being othered by the state was not new to some specific communities, such as the LGBTI community, feminist activists, and ethnic minorities, unlike the general crowd in Gezi. For that reason, these communities knew how to organize quickly; they had resources, experienced activists, strategies for effective resistance, and the awareness of intersectionality. All these qualities made them highly influential in developing solidarity in coalition with others in Gezi, in other words, in developing the Gezi Spirit.

These qualities also highlight the importance of the call and response relationship that I argue underlies the development of Gezi as a movement; without the spontaneous inception of Gezi and the large number of energetic but unorganized Gezi protesters, the organized LGBTI movement may not have been able to find the opportunity to foster a strong response to its two decades long call for solidarity from various groups. At the same time, those apolitical groups did not have the experience to organize in Gezi on their own, or to realize and respond to

intersections of oppression, essential in the production of solidarity, without the contributions of experienced activists.

### 3.1.2 Photo Analysis



Figure 1A, Retrieved From:  
[http://arabic.jadaliyya.com/content\\_images/fck\\_images/Gruber\\_figure1\\_3.jpg](http://arabic.jadaliyya.com/content_images/fck_images/Gruber_figure1_3.jpg)



Figure 1B, Retrieved From:  
[https://meclistelgbti.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/7eadaaa2ced311e2b4f02200a1f9ac6\\_7.jpg](https://meclistelgbti.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/7eadaaa2ced311e2b4f02200a1f9ac6_7.jpg)

The photos above are of the LGBT Blok's booth in Gezi Park. The first one shows the side part of the booth and the second one is of the front side. I chose to use both photos, because while the first photo provides more opportunity to talk about the relation between the presence and effectiveness of the LGBT Blok in Gezi and the past experiences of the LGBTI movement, the second one shows the bigger picture of the booth as well as how crowded it would become. One of my interviewees, E-bear, told me about how they came up with the idea of the group:

I got out of work, we went to the spot where LGBTI community were meeting. Before we knew it, it grew bigger; it started becoming a crowd that didn't fit inside the park and spread through Taksim Square. When it turned that way we

said we should show ourselves, and decided to march amongst the crowd... because there were so many LGBT individuals got together spontaneously and independently, not initiated by any organization... we were about to march. We are marching like this and that's good, but who are we, right?... at that moment I had an idea, the idea of the LGBT Blok. I sat down immediately, we had a white banner that we had used during IstanBear festivals, I flipped it over and wrote "LGBT Blok."

In the second photo, the banner E-bear prepared is visible as well as a rainbow flag on top of the booth, and the activists cannot be distinguished because of the crowd in front of the bloc.

Further, my participant explains the function of the group:

We opened booths there, we found tables from here and there. I opened accounts on Twitter and Facebook as "the LGBT Blok." We started announcing our needs related to food, drinks and accommodation from those accounts daily. It grew like topsy! It was unbelievable how much help we got. Everybody was calling, from artists and the rich to the poor; they wanted to donate anything you can imagine... we had everything; from food and drinks to supplies that protected us from the police violence... we prepared food and sent it to the barricades. There were people from the LGBT Blok at the barricades, but we did not bring food only to ourselves; firstly to the LGBT Blok, then to people who worked with the LGBT Blok, then to everyone else at the barricades... I was also providing medical assistance from the LGBT Blok because I'm a doctor. There were also a few nurses who were mothers of LGBT, and some LGBT medical staff; we created a team all together. We were providing service to everybody from our spot (E-bear).

While an experienced activist turned IstanBear Festival's banner into a new chapter for the LGBTI movement, the community gathered what they could find to build their booths, claiming the umbrellas of well-known beverage companies (as seen in both photos), gathered all their resources together to provide various assistance to protesters, and created an organized group from an unorganized crowd in one day, presenting the first important implications of a dialectical relationship. Both my participant E-bear's statements, and these photos point to the fact that despite the independent nature of the LGBTI crowd in Gezi, the experienced activists knew the importance of being organized, and this is why they immediately came together, later naming

themselves “the LGBT Blok.” Therefore, although the LGBTI community got together in the park spontaneously, responding to the call, it was the previous experiences of the activists that helped them mobilize and come up with strategies quickly. The movement’s experience and previous coalitions with other groups showed its benefits in the most concrete way under this common roof, the LGBT Blok.

In the first photo, there are six signs that can be read on the side part of the booth. All but one (the Pride Week poster) were prepared long before the Gezi protests started. The green “lollipop” attached to the umbrella reads: “Lesbians exist,” drawing attention to lesbian invisibility. Another one reads: “Trans identities are not a disorder!”, protesting the common “diagnosis” by politicians and doctors. They are both used several times during LGBTI Pride weeks, International Workers' Days, LGBTI and women’s rights related protests and marches in Turkey, and these issues were brought to Gezi to be discussed with the larger protesters. The other “lollipop” that is purple reads: “Correct the mistake, respect the law.” This sign had been used on various occasions to support Pınar Selek<sup>1</sup>. The LGBTI community has been actively supporting her freedom at every opportunity, and the sign reveals that even in Gezi the community kept advocating not only for their own rights, but also for various other issues. Previous activism on social justice issues for all provided the LGBTI community with a base of support in Gezi held up by various groups that had ties with the movement even before the protests. One of the two half visible, white sign says: “My child is gay,” and the other one says:

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<sup>1</sup> Pınar Selek is a prominent Turkish feminist sociologist, who has actively worked on the rights of vulnerable communities in Turkey. The authorities accused her of being a terrorist because of her research on the Kurdish issue. She was arrested as a suspect after the explosion at the Spice Bazaar in 1998, and she was subjected to torture and ill treatment during two and a half years of imprisonment. She has been accused and acquitted of all charges related to the bombing of the Spice Bazaar three times since 1998. In 2013, the court sentenced her to life in prison despite the experts’ conclusion that the explosion was caused by the ignition of a gas cylinder. She currently lives in France in order not to be imprisoned (Güneş, 2013; Mavzer, 2013).

“Don’t touch my child’s future.” They were both prepared by members of LİSTAG (Families of LGBTs in İstanbul), a group that was formed in 2008. Because the institution of family is very important in Turkey’s culture, the existence of LİSTAG in Gezi was significant; many groups who had met with LGBTI individuals for the first time in their lives realized that those “pervert faggots” actually had and were supported by their families. Finally, the last poster advertises the İstanbul LGBTI Pride Week and the march, and it has a drawing of a LGBTI Gezi activist holding a rainbow flag on top of a barricade, which may be a reference to a well-known Gezi image (see Figure 5). The poster was created during the Gezi Park protests, but the theme of the pride week, “*Direniş*” (Resistance), was decided months before the protests started. The LGBTI community, “naturally born activists because of what they endure in life” (Yinanç, 2013), thought it would be a fitting theme for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pride marches, the first of which was possible only after previous decade of resistance history. The existence of all these signs in the LGBT Blok’s booth reveals that the community had been actively resisting various injustice issues before Gezi and those experiences provided them efficient strategies, and already existing networks during Gezi.

Given the deep previous resistance history of the LGBTI community, it is not surprising that the opinions of many groups who had previously had prejudice against the LGBTI community started to change as a result of the contributions of the community to the broader Gezi resistance. This shifting process defined the further unfolding of the call and response relationship in Gezi. Apart from the external implications of this effective organization, the LGBT Blok also seems to be an example of a local movement center. Morris (1984) suggests:

When a dominated group has assembled the required resources, strategically placed activists, and effective tactics and strategies for protest purposes, it has developed a local

movement center... a local movement center is thus a distinctive form of social organization specifically developed by members of a dominated group to produce, organize, coordinate, finance, and sustain social protest (p.p. 283-284).

Without a movement center, he suggests that planned actions would be costly and delayed. From this position, the experience of the community not only helped open up many new opportunities for the LGBTI movement, but it also provided strategies and quick mobilization to the larger Gezi resistance. Therefore, I argue that the community's past experiences and activism were critical to the recent achievements of the LGBTI movement. I will discuss the implications of these contributions in greater detail in the following section.

### *3.1.3 Self reflections & observations*

Apart from the points I already discussed in previous sections, I believe I have little to add in regards to the past experiences of the LGBTI movement. However, I would like to convey a spontaneous conversation I had with one of my interviewees, Trans Blok, on the way to our interview location in order to further discuss the implications of the LGBTI community's contributions to the Gezi resistance:

TB: You're working on LGBTI and Gezi, but what are you going to claim exactly? That the LGBTI movement started with Gezi?

ES: No, I don't believe it did. I'll emphasize the importance of the past struggles of the movement as well.

TB: Bingo! We get so many invitations from researchers and reporters about this, but they all show it like Gezi is the beginning for us. They all ask what the LGBTI movement gained from Gezi, but nobody asks what Gezi gained from the LGBTI movement.

Previous to our interview I had no relationship with my interviewee so she did not know about my identity as a past LGBTI activist, and since she was clearly disappointed with the results of her previous interviews she approached my research project cautiously at the beginning. I believe her last sentence of the conversation is crucial here, and it should be unfolded in two parts.

Firstly, it is true that the LGBTI movement gained a lot from Gezi; it earned the respect and solidarity of many groups and individuals, it built new alliances with groups who were previously homophobic and transphobic, such as socialists, and it gained recognition and support from some political parties. On the other hand, Morris (1984) claims that when groups and individuals give support to a movement voluntarily, they facilitate social change for it, and when political actors provide resources to that movement non-voluntarily that assistance should be seen as part of the social change, because it would only come as an outcome of the movement's efforts. In either case, the external assistance would be possible only if the movement is already strong. Although the wider scope of the Gezi protests' outcome is still unclear, one of the most significant implications for social change, the outside support the LGBTI movement gained in Gezi, was possible because the movement already had the strength to facilitate that support. Last but not least, as my interviewee brought up, it is important to draw attention to the fact that this facilitation was a result of the movement's contributions to Gezi, which was possible only because of its resistance history. All these points relate to the practice of call and response, revealing the dialectical relationship between several complex constituents of pre and post Gezi. Morris continues his arguments by suggesting that well-organized movements also make way for a larger collective action because of its strong organizational structures and strategies that can be adopted by other dominated groups. It would be presumptuous to claim that it was solely the LGBTI movement that sparked off the Gezi resistance, but as some of my interviewees stated,

the members of the movement were one of the few groups that had been present in Gezi since the very beginning. As I argue above, the dialectical relationship between the spontaneous and the organized participants produced mutual benefits and implications for the constituents of Gezi; the strategies and experienced activists of the LGBTI community, along with those of other experienced movements, contributed to the quick mobilization and effective organization of the larger resistance, and therefore both external resources were provided to the movement as a result of the benefits it provided to Gezi.

### *Conclusion*

To sum up, I would like to share one last reflection Trans Blok made during our interview since it seems to piece everything I have discussed in this chapter together:

This wasn't the first social protest the LGBTI community joined. This wasn't the first social reaction either. We have been fighting for 20 years. We are in the Kurdish movement; we are in the environmental movement; we are in the feminist movement... they [people] can be surprised, I'm not. Gezi itself was fantastical, but the presence of the LGBTI community in Gezi wasn't. I had already been everywhere. *They* saw this for the first time... last year 80.000 people marched at the LGBTI pride week, everybody says "LGBTI, LGBTI." This is not a beginning, this is a result. Of course not an end, but this is the outcome of that 20 years-long struggle.

As Poindexter (1997) suggests, a dominated group's emergence and sustainability depends on the existent resources, experienced activists, internal/external networks, and strategies. As pointed out by my participant, the LGBTI movement in Turkey had already sustained two decades of activism before the inception of Gezi, and those two decades of struggle seem to have added the necessary powder to the spontaneous spark of Gezi; the combination was all that the LGBTI movement needed for an explosion. The effects of the Gezi Park protests on the success the LGBTI movement achieved in the past two years are undeniably clear and significant; however, it should also be remembered that the path of social justice the movement has been



walking on is a lot longer than many make it out to be. The examination of that path overlooking the miles that were covered over twenty years would be like reading only the second half of a book, lacking various important points that lead the story to the current chapter.

### 3.2 Gezi Park as a Queer Space

Most of the world heard about the existence of Gezi Park for the first time after the protests in Turkey were reported by international media in 2013, but the park has been the point of power struggles for many years in Turkey. The space was used as artillery barracks by the Ottoman Empire from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1930s, when it was turned into a park as part of the modernization projects of the Turkish Republic (Inceoglu, 2015). Since its construction, the park and its area has been the point where the most important demonstrations and marches in Istanbul would take place. Because of clashes and conflicts between the government and left-wing groups since the 1970s, the area has become a symbol of political power struggle; the government would often not allow demonstrations to take place in the area, but the left-wing groups would still go there despite the official ban. From this standpoint, the AKP government's project to build a replica of the Ottoman barracks, a mall, and a mosque in the park's place can be seen as an obvious attempt to claim that power the park symbolized. It can also be seen as a motive for the left-wing groups' involvement in the Gezi resistance. Apart from this political history though, the park was not a very popular place for the general population, especially at night. There were two major groups who used the park often: street children, and gay/bisexual men. While street kids would use the park to take shelter there, as they were repressed and driven away from other public places, gay/bisexual men would use the park as a cruising area, so much so that the park was even known as "The Faggot Park" (İşeri & Çetin, 2013). In this way, Gezi Park was a queer space as it disrupted the visible norms by providing a home to the invisible outsiders who have been excluded from most of the other public spaces in the city. The LGBTI community is one of the major groups that have been affected by the urbanization projects of the government because their ghettos have recently been

taken away one by one (Firat, 2013). Most of my interviewees defined their motivation to join the protests as “the boiling point of oppression,” and therefore it would be reasonable to argue that first being restricted to specific areas, and then being driven away even from those areas was one of the important causes that brought the LGBTI community to a boiling point.

In this section, I investigate whether my interview participants found any relation between the park’s symbolic meaning for the LGBTI community and their involvement in the protests, and I examine their conflicting thoughts on the issue. I include my observations and analysis of a photograph in the same section. First, because I never lived in Istanbul, I was not aware of this alternative use of the space for the community before the Gezi protests, and therefore my observations are limited on this specific issue, and they cover only what I saw and heard during and after the protests. Secondly, those observations feel more complete when they are viewed as a photo-story, just as the photograph I choose to use finds more meaning when it is analyzed together with my observations.

### *3.2.1 Interviews*

#### *The Boiling point of oppression & the Park’s Importance for the LGBTI Community*

Although there is a common rhetoric around the inclusiveness and accessibility of public space, there are significant exclusions in public areas based on gender, class, and race (Hou, 2010). One of the major groups that have been victimized by this exclusion is the LGBTI community in Turkey, and therefore the community needs alternative places to exist and socialize. Despite the fact that there are already very few ghettos and socialization places where LGBTI individuals can feel safe enough to be themselves, the government has aimed to “clear” those areas as part of its urbanization project, making the LGBTI community one of the deeply

wounded victims of the project (Firat 2013). Gezi Park is one of those alternative places that have been used by the community (specifically by gay and bisexual men) as a cruising area, and the effects of this fact on the LGBTI community's involvement in Gezi is one of the topics that has been discussed often by the community during and after the protests.

Surprisingly, none of my interview participants tied their involvement in the protests directly to the park's importance as a queer space, although they all mentioned the meaning of the park for the LGBTI community. Upon closer examination of their responses however, it became clear to me that there was still a connection to the park's alternative use. For example, even though E-bear explained his main motivation was environmental concerns and a demand for individual rights, one of his statements revealed that he was among the first people who gathered in the park as a result of his "coincidental" presence there, a place he went with his friends for cruising:

Because Gezi is 200-300 meters away from my home, I'm a man who goes to Gezi Park almost everyday to roam, sometimes to have fun with friends, and to cruise. That day my friends and I coincidentally went to Gezi Park just to roam, and also for cruising (he smiles). I saw people gathering together at the corner. It was the very beginning; the Gezi incidents had not started yet... there were also a few LGBT activists there, we chit-chatted a little bit and stayed there with them. The following day incidents grew and we went back...

It is clear from his statement that Gezi was not just one of the parks in the city for E-bear and his friends, but it appeared to be a place where they could feel comfortable enough and safer to assert their identity, and this is the very reason why he was in the park with his friends in the very beginning. As Mitchell (cited in Hou, 2010, p. 7) suggests, "struggle is the only way that the right to public space can be maintained and the only way that social justice can be advanced," and so it can be argued that a long-time resister group, the LGBTI community, and more specifically, gay and bisexual men, consciously or not went to Gezi Park not only to claim their

right to the public space, but also to claim their right to exist safely in those places. In the end, as Çiçek stated during our interview, people may not have had anything concrete in their mind related to their LGBTI identity when they went to Gezi, but identity always played a part in their decision to be involved in the protests, as the place was an area to maintain spatial freedom, and to perform LGBTI visibility and politics.

It is possible that the reason for the absence of data that I collected from my interviewees on this particular subject may also be because of the fact that it was only gay/bisexual men who used the park to socialize with each other, and E-bear was my only participant who identified as a gay man. Apart from him no other participant mentioned a personal meaning of the park regarding their sexual orientation/gender identity. To illustrate, Angelik draws attention to the exclusionary nature of public spaces based on gender:

It is generally men who say that, they say “it’s [Gezi Park] a cruising area”, or they want to provide a motivation saying “we need that place, they can’t close that place down.” But as a lesbian, it is a problem for me to even be in public domains to satisfy my spatial needs in cities late at night, let alone to find a partner. Public spaces always belong to men, whether they are gay or not. Their motivation comes from that.

As she points out, it is unimaginable for a woman to use a public space such as Gezi Park in the same way a man can. Because of this inaccessibility, only a specific group of people from the LGBTI community had personal experiences regarding their identity in Gezi. However, as I mentioned before, the LGBTI community in Turkey has close ties of solidarity and shares a collective memory despite differences, and therefore each important experience finds a collective reaction not only from its immediate subjects, but also from the community. For this reason, although the park’s usage as a cruising area by gay and bisexual men may not directly be a motivation for all members of the community to get involved in the protests, it would be valid to

mention as an indirect connection. For example, Çiçek and Seda stated that their motivation came as a sudden reaction to stand together with their friends from the LGBTI community when they heard about the police attack. Seda's response indicated that several other LGBTI individuals might have also been involved in Gezi out of a similar reaction:

My girlfriend is not an activist... but even she couldn't stay home during Gezi when we were home once or twice to take a short break. She was always saying "I can't stay home while people are being tear gassed there," and of course by "people" she means her friends, because our friends were there. Because the LGBTI movement is involved in many things, there has been a culture of solidarity for years.

Clearly, it was this culture of solidarity within the LGBTI community that brought Seda, her girlfriend, and Çiçek to Gezi. Similarly, one of Trans Blok's statements reveals that her initial reaction that brought her to the park resembled Seda's reasoning:

The matter for me and for the first ten people in there [Gezi] was to protect the trees. Our motivation was environmental. I don't think LGBTI individuals did anything extra. We did what everyone else did... not one more, not one less... I don't use Twitter. I was watching TV, I saw two rainbow flags, and I said 'I'm going.' Nobody communicated with each other.

Although she explained her motivation to join the protests as environmental concerns at first, her following statement reveals that it was the moment she saw the rainbow flags that immediately drew her to the protests. Once again, a process of call and response reveals itself even among the LGBTI community itself: although Seda, her girlfriend, Çiçek and Trans Blok did not have meanings attached to Gezi Park itself, the personal attachment their friends called and connected them to the same collective action as a response. As a result, after examining the responses of E-bear Seda and Trans Blok together, it can be argued that in addition to environmental concerns, the first LGBTI group in the park were already there because the park was symbolic "home" for them, producing a spontaneous call for the rest of the LGBTI

community, and the second group followed to resist the police violence with their friends, responding to the call quickly thanks to the community's culture of solidarity.

Furthermore, a memory Trans Blok shared with me when she was in Gezi revealed that it was not only the LGBTI community that was aware of the park's usage by gay/bisexual men and the impact it might have had on the protests in general:

They [people] would say "Faggots' Park," "Asses' Park." Afterwards during the resistance we saw that they wrote this on the wall: "What a precious ass that you have! It cost 300.000 people" (she smiles). I got a photo taken in front of it. Their observation was so good. And probably it wasn't a faggot who wrote that.

Since the graffiti makes reference to gay men humorously, and uses the pronoun "you," my interviewee may be right about assuming that it was not written by a member of the LGBTI community. In any case, the writer acknowledges the park's meaning for gay men, and the probability that their determination to be present in the park since the very beginning might have had a crucial impact on bringing not only the LGBTI community, but also 300.000 other protesters to the park. In this sense, the park's meaning as a queer space seems to have had both direct and indirect impacts on the LGBTI community's involvement in the protests, as well as influencing how that involvement and its effects were perceived by the larger Gezi movement.

### 3.2.2 Photo Analysis & Personal Observations



Figure 2 - Retrieved From: <http://everywheretaksim.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/lgbt.jpeg>

While the Gezi Park protests were still going on, I read a post on Facebook that was written by one of the protesters who was concerned about the street kids wanting to fight the police at the front lines of the barricades. She was suggesting that the kids were doing this to show gratitude to the protesters for providing food to them, so we needed to let them know that they didn't have to fight for us in order to show their thankfulness. Her genuine concern was appreciable; however, her observation was inaccurate, and maybe even a little patronizing. It is true that the protesters gave out free food and drinks in the park, and I observed how happy the kids were when I was there. However, I would argue that their eager involvement in the clashes was not because it was their way of showing gratitude to the protesters, but rather they had their own motives to protect the park as well. Gay and bisexual men were not the only ones who felt comfortable using the park at night; street kids who had nowhere else to go in the center of the



city would often sleep in the park. Betsky (as cited in Cottrill, 2006) suggests “queer space queers reality to produce a space to live” (p. 362); the boundaries of many protesters’ realities made the queer characteristics of the park invisible to them, (as observed in that Facebook post), but the park was a space to live for the street kids, and so it was literally their home.

In the photo above that was taken right outside Gezi we can see the two most common “residents” of the park: a gay/bisexual man, and a street kid. Although they are standing in front of the police, they both have comfortable body posture, and they are wearing casual clothes, almost giving a feeling that they just got out of bed (and maybe they did). In the end, probably none of the protesters had spent a night in the park before they set up their tents for occupation, except for street kids and gay/bisexual men. Naturally, it is not surprising that those were two of the groups who would be at the frontlines of the barricades during clashes with the police, because they were not only protecting the environment, but they were protecting one of the last safe spaces they could exist in the city. Ayman (2013) reflects on one of her memories during Gezi:

On Saturday before Gezi Park was cleared [by the police] a street kid said this to my friend: “Sister, don’t go. When you go we become so lonely.”

The sadness in this sentence is another indicator that the Facebook post got it wrong: the street kids during clashes were not thanking us by fighting the cops. If anything, they might have thanked us for helping them defend their home because they are the ones who had been there long before any other protester, and they are the ones who remained there after everyone else left the park. Unlike most of the protesters, they had not just realized the importance of the park; they always knew. In the same way, gay and bisexual men had a similar connection and a feeling of belonging to the park, which played an important role in bringing the LGBTI community

together in Gezi. Because of the previously mentioned fact that the community has the collective memory of resistance and standing together free from time, space, or personal relevance, any reality that belongs to the community in one place becomes a part of the collective memory for the whole community. For this reason, although not all members of the community in Istanbul were directly motivated by the park's importance as a queer space, their shared group identity and sense of community made the lived experiences of some individuals an important factor in collective resistance. As the LGBTI activists stated in their 2014 assessment (LGBTI News Turkey, 2015), the LGBTI community as a whole was active and visible during the protests, and the LGBTI movement in Turkey expanded significantly during and after the protests (as I will discuss more in detail in section 3.5).

### *Conclusion*

*"Queer space is an "invisible network" of people and places with an inside and an outside."*

*(Cottrill, 2006, p. 362)*

One year after the protests, I went back to Gezi Park at night. There were some people passing by, a few young men talking and laughing together, and another man was selling rainbow flags and LGBTI-related pins and posters on the ground. At first I was surprised that the man was not *outside* the park in Taksim Square, which is one of the most crowded areas in Istanbul, but that he was *inside* the park where there are only few people during the night. However, the more I thought about it the more it made sense; a gay man in Taksim Square may not feel comfortable enough to stop at a street vendor to buy rainbow flags and pins, but the park is *his* territory, it is where he can openly assert his identity without fearing the unfriendly gaze upon him. If the park had been destroyed as the government planned a year ago, those young men would probably not have been in Taksim at that time of the night, at least not in the same

way, and that street vendor would be selling something else, or somewhere else. The thought and the quiet comfort in the park was almost an assurance that despite some claims that Occupy Gezi failed, the AKP government seems to have lost the power struggle over Gezi Park so far, and the park has been returned to its “rightful residents.” As Carter’s (2009) documents on the Stonewall Inn riots suggest, when an oppressed community’s safe spaces are taken from them one by one, a strong backlash is to be expected sooner or later. Just as that backlash happened in New York after the police raid in Stonewall Inn, it happened in Istanbul after the government attempted to destroy Gezi Park. Similar to how the gay liberation movement spread quickly to the whole country from New York, the strengthened and more visibilized LGBTI movement spread its dynamics to the whole country from Istanbul. Almost half a century after the Stonewall riots, the inn still serves the LGBTI community in New York. That night when I was in Gezi Park I had the hope that the park will be standing there half a century after the protests, still serving as home for the LGBTI community, though this time not as a last shelter with distinctly drawn lines of an “inside” and an “outside,” but as one of the many safe spaces where the community can freely live their identity; and in that just society no child in the park will feel lonely anymore.

### 3.3 Individual Interactions and the Awareness of Intersections of Oppression in Gezi

According to Freire (2005),

Almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or “sub-oppressors.”... At this level, their perception of themselves as opposites of the oppressor does not yet signify engagement in a struggle to overcome the contradiction; the one pole aspires not to liberation, but to identification with its opposite pole (p. 45-46).

From a Freirean point of view, the dominant system works effectively; it infuses the people with the benefits of being the oppressor, so that the oppressed do not work for true liberation by diminishing the hierarchical system, but rather maintain and strengthen the values of the very same system by contributing to the oppression of someone else. With this idea maintained and encouraged in all institutions of the system, and perpetuated in everyday life by the privileged, it seems to be the only possible system that has been working well for the majority, while some others feel helpless against such a deeply rooted structure. Naturally, the privileged enjoy a vast amount of opportunities that come from exploiting the rights of the others and the oppressed constantly try to gain the same benefits that their oppressors have by essentializing their category of oppression in their resistance, which results in the maintenance of the macro system that feeds the micro structures of oppression. Because the systems of oppression intersect and are interlocking, a focus on one centralized category of oppression, such as racism, brings out only limited improvement, contributes to another category of oppression in the process (Carastathis, 2014), and it does not result in what Freire calls “true liberation.” Although each marginalized community resists and demands justice for their own cause, the failure to realize where the actual

problem lies and the lack of unity against the system weakens the true potential of each of these movements (Badiou, 2013).

What made the Gezi protests unique was the essence of the resistance: the Gezi Spirit, the spirit that, according to Freire, is “almost always” missing “during the initial stage of the struggle.” When the people came together against the powerful and interacted with each other without prejudice in Gezi, they realized that their victimization worked through various intersections of oppression. Although their experiences were different, the interlocking nature of these systems is frequently overlooked with the result that social movements construct internal exclusions. The Gezi spirit revealed that by focusing on a centralized category of victimization, they did not only maintain these systems, but they contributed to their own marginalization as well because a monistic approach to oppression overlooks the complexity of multiple categories of oppression that are in play at once (Carastathis, 2014). The unity in Gezi, by contrast, illustrated that when the focus shifts from overcoming an essentialized category of oppression to the coalition of the oppressed for collective liberation, the people can achieve unthinkable successes; those who are in power are forced to recognize the needs and demands of the oppressed, the political environment of a country can change significantly, and new movements arise or already existing movements are empowered, promising even more positive change despite all the odds. One of those oppressed groups have always been the LGBTI community in Turkey, and the increased awareness and solidarity among people during and after Gezi has had significant impacts on the improvements the LGBTI movement achieved since the beginning of the protests. Furthermore, the already-existing awareness in the LGBTI movement did not only enable the community members to immediately challenge (hetero)sexist, homophobic and transphobic discourses and practices, but it also helped other social movements in Gezi to learn

from the LGBTI movement as well as from similar movements that had a related understanding of intersections of oppression.

In this section, I examine what opportunities were created as a result of the awareness of intersections of oppression. I ask: what were the implications of interactions the LGBTI community had with other groups in Gezi, and how and why was this kind of interaction possible during such a chaotic time? As all three methods of data collection present a complete picture of this particular theme, I integrate them during data analysis of this section. I considered some similarities on the issue between the South African lesbian and gay movement and the experiences of my interview participants as well as my own. Although the photograph I chose to use is not directly related to LGBTI issues, it reflects the Gezi Spirit, which encompasses the experiences of the LGBTI community.

### *3.3.1 Interviews*

#### *The Effects of Spontaneity and Lack of Political Labels*

Perhaps the most important reason for Gezi's success was because of its spontaneous nature and the fact that many people and groups went to the park to protect the environment as well as their individual rights. In Turkey, historically, when there is a call for action from a certain party or political group, many other groups that are not related to that particular ideology have a tendency to avoid being involved in that demonstration, because of a strict separation of ideologies, or for fear of being labeled with a certain movement/group. This tendency can also be traced to violent political conflicts that resulted in army coups in Turkey's recent past<sup>1</sup>. However,

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent army coup happened in 1980 as a result of the armed conflicts between right and left-winged groups, during which almost 6.000 people were killed. The army ruled the country for three years, and during that time there were also hundreds of deaths, and hundreds of thousands of people were arrested.

there was no call from any groups when the Gezi protests started, and only a small group of individuals who had environmental concerns went to the park in the beginning. When the police violently attacked those nonaligned demonstrators, anyone who had a problem with the growing despotic tendencies of the government felt free to rise against the system without having to take on any political labels. Although the government tried to divide the protesters by emphasizing their different ideologies and identities, the people became aware of how and why such a diverse group of people came together in the same place. In the end, there was only one united identity against the system: *Geziciler* (although it is difficult to provide an exact translation, it can be read as “Gezi protesters”), or *Çapulcular* (looters)<sup>1</sup>.

My interviewee Trans Blok mentioned how she was brought up to be apolitical; her parents would strictly advise her not to be involved in right or left wing groups because of harsh political conflicts in the country’s recent past. My interviewee Seda also briefly mentioned how people generally avoid being part of political conversations especially with strangers in Turkey, and she said that it was so unusual during Gezi that people were discussing the incidents all together, even on buses. The spontaneity of the events at Gezi brought people from many various backgrounds together in one place for the same purpose. For many protesters this was the point where the environmental demonstrations took a political turn, and it turned into a movement to claim rights. For example, E-bear who was in the park from the first days of the demonstrations talked about how and why this shift happened during our interview:

The people’s democratic rights were being hindered; their rights to protect the environment were being hindered. As if that weren’t enough violence was used, right? When these two combined there were two reasons... when they [demonstrations] grew bigger and bigger, next thing we knew all “the othered” were there. Everybody started being there to do something about their otherness,

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<sup>1</sup> Both terms were used by Tayyip Erdogan to degrade the protesters at first. The protesters immediately claimed the terms as their identity proudly and transformed their meanings, much like the claiming/transformation of the term *queer* by the LGBTI community.

and the incidents turned into a social and political thing from protecting a tree, environment, and nature for me. I'm a LGBT, as well as a Kurd, and also a Christian. There is a government that oppresses and ignores all of these. Moreover, there is a government that interferes in people's bodies, women's bodies, from how many children they should have to their abortion rights. All of these created a cyclical reason for all the othered to come together. It resulted in gathering of all people who were oppressed and dominated by the government in the park.

As E-bear's observations suggest, there was at least one reason for so many different people to join the protests in Gezi, and many were standing at the crossroads of multiple systems of oppression, such as E-bear who was marginalized due to three different identity categories.

Although there were also many groups with conflicting ideologies and backgrounds, all these people shared one common thing: they were tired of being oppressed and they were there to do something about it. At that point, the spontaneity of the events seemed to have created an incredible result; the park provided a space for all these people to get together for the first time, where almost everybody was much more open to listening to each other without their previous strict prejudices. In the following sections, I will talk about the impacts of this unusual environment in the park in terms of its effects on the LGBTI movement.

#### *Awareness of Intersectionality & the LGBTI Community's Contribution*

Although the LGBTI movement had been discussing the intersections of oppression and calling for solidarity for decades when the Gezi protests started, there was a high amount of prejudice against sexual minorities from several other marginalized communities and political groups. Gezi proved to be a turning point for the LGBTI movement as it opened up the possibility for the community to practice its theoretical awareness concretely and visibly, and provided the opportunity for other groups in Gezi to hear this genuine solidarity call of the movement for the first time. As a result, despite the ongoing conflicts and differences, several groups that had previously been strictly against the LGBTI community started to understand the



connection between different kinds of oppressions and realize how much stronger they were when everybody stood shoulder to shoulder against injustice. One of the most common slogans used by the LGBTI movement in Turkey found concrete embodiment in Gezi, and it was adopted by the general Gezi movement: *“Kurtuluş yok tek başına, ya hep beraber ya hiçbirimiz”* (there is no liberation alone, either altogether or none of us). Consequently, as it was stressed by Çakmak (in Yinanç, 2013), the government’s effort to create divisions between the protesters had little effect, and their excuse that “society is not ready yet” for legislation to recognize sexual minorities lost its legitimacy as strong bonds were established between this “marginalized” group and the “common” people.

In the open environment of Gezi, people started communicating with each other in a way that was unimaginable previously, and the more they interacted while leaving their prejudices aside, the more they realized how related their stories of otherness were as well as how those prejudices contributed to the continuity of the oppressive system. My participant, Çiçek, explained how people were a lot more open to understanding each other and how it affected the LGBTI movement with a powerful metaphor:

Gezi had an effect like... like there was an amplifier attached to everybody’s voice and it could be heard in public because everybody was paying close attention to each other, they cared about each other’s opinions, they were tired of the prime minister’s statements... Because of that amplifier effect our experiences or struggle expanded significantly, and reached so many people so it created an unusual impact, an impact against homophobia and transphobia.

As she suggested, people in the protests began discussing politics; there was a growing perception that they were there to understand each other and create solutions, instead of opposing each other’s ideas and trying to force their own on others.’ In such an environment, Seda agreed, “nobody felt the need to impose their identity upon others.” As people shared their own experiences and listened to each other’s, they were able to see how some categories of

oppression sometimes intersected and constructed related forms of victimization. For example, it became clear through interaction that a lesbian Kurdish woman was experiencing victimization through multiple structures simultaneously, and she could be a part of three different movements (Kurdish Independence, LGBTI, and feminist) at the same time. It also became clear that when these movements focused on single issues without touching upon their intersections, these individuals would have to divide their time and energy between three different struggles. When all these movements came together and made the connections between intersecting systems of oppression, they empowered both their own movements and the collective struggle against the system at the same time. As a result of this realization, several groups in Gezi not only overcame their prejudices against the LGBTI community, but they also became advocates for the community's issues as well. Consequently, the togetherness of the diverse crowd significantly increased the strength of the protests and created so many stories of solidarity in the park that the protests came to be perceived as a threat for the government. Then Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan (currently President) often used divisive discourse emphasizing the seemingly conflicting identities of the protesters, such as branding the Kurdish and radical leftist groups as terrorists and inviting other "innocent, but badly influenced youth" (previously apolitical) to leave the park, in order to create a separation between the protesters as well as a reaction among the non-protesters. He might have been successful in creating a reaction against the protesters, but the ideas and awareness of the people who were in Gezi "soared beyond the academicians, leaders, organizations, and columnists" (Çiçek). Evidently, once the crowd realized how tightly the structures of oppression were organized, they also realized that discourses of division, like those of the prime minister, had kept them apart for years, and that they could not achieve liberation by focusing solely on their own marginalization. This realization played a crucial part

in revealing the links between multiple systems and repelling the divisive discourses that aimed to destroy the strong solidarity among groups during Gezi. Once the government failed to disperse the crowd by creating a division between the protesters, they increased the strength of the police forces in order to stop the growing threat by using more violence.

Because it is a crucial point of consideration, it should be repeated that although I am describing what was a fresh awareness for many groups in the park, the LGBTI community had already known that taking a stand for LGBTI rights meant taking a stand against all kinds of violence and oppression (Epprecht, 2013). During our interview, Trans Blok drew attention to the LGBTI movement's previous awareness of other social justice issues:

Especially organized LGBTI activists knows it well that we say “we neither want privilege nor discrimination...” this means that we are not people who have buried their heads in only LGBTI issues... one of the things we take pride in is that we show awareness about many issues.

The statement that she quoted has been one of the primary mottos of the LGBTI movement for many years, and the LGBTI activists have always tried to educate themselves and raise the same awareness among other oppressed groups. For example, in the 21<sup>st</sup> issue of Kaos GL magazine, which has worked as a collective platform to discuss the politics and aims of the LGBTI movement since its first issue, Başaran (1996), made a call to LGBTI initiatives and individuals to discuss the direction they wanted for the LGBTI movement. In her call, she suggests that the patriarchal and capitalist system creates a set of values that exclude some groups according to processes of racialization, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and that these are tied in “a web of relationships.” A group of readers, Cengiz, Atilla A. & Mehmet (1996), respond to the call by pointing to the internal exclusions in the LGBTI movement due to different categories of oppression, specifically class, and claim that a movement that does not reject authority all together cannot be strong. Similarly, another respondent, Özalp (1996), highlights different

categories of oppression within the movement, and claims that as long as there is a power hierarchy, inequality will prevail. It can be argued that all these early internal discussions helped the LGBTI movement build a strong, conscious, intersectional base. The effects of this strong base can be seen clearly after reviewing *Kaos GL* issues as a whole: the discussions in the magazine touches upon various issues such as the Kurdish problem, environmentalism, feminism, socialism, veganism, (anti)militarism, etc., and points to the importance of building coalitions with other liberation movements.

In order to emphasize the importance of this consciousness among the LGBTI community, I find it beneficial to make reference to one of the first and most important lesbian and gay organizations in South Africa, the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA). As I previously discussed through Gevisser's (1995) study, GASA mainly consisted of white, middle-class men, and tried to stay neutral to other social justice issues. However, during the 80s when so many political injustices were happening in the country, this lack of consciousness of apartheid in the lives of Black lesbians and gays resulted in anger and opposition against GASA, and as a result the organization finally collapsed in 1986. It was only when the movement started discussing the intersections of oppression, and became more inclusive towards other oppressed people that it gained a new momentum and broader success. Unlike the first wave of the lesbian and gay movement in South Africa, as my participants and *Kaos GL* issues suggest, the LGBTI movement in Turkey has always tried to remain conscious of the issues of other oppressed communities as well as their own. My interviewees seemed to feel that they had already been carrying the Gezi Spirit long before the protests started. To illustrate, Seda stated that she sees the LGBTI movement as a small projection of Gezi; people come together from various backgrounds with one purpose: advocating social justice, and since she has been a long-time

LGBTI activist, she felt that Gezi Spirit did not have a great effect on her because it was a consciousness she had inhabited for years. This awareness however, made it possible for the movement to see what it was lacking in terms of more inclusiveness during the protests (which I will discuss in section 3.4) and also contributed to the generation of the Gezi Spirit. This mutual benefit was once again the indicator of a call and response relationship. Although the LGBTI movement had been trying to draw attention to the interlocking nature of systems of oppression, and calling out to other oppressed groups since the first years of the movement's emergence, it was the uniting environment of Gezi, and significant contributions of the movement in all areas during the protests that enabled a response to that call; other oppressed groups started respecting and trusting the LGBTI community (Hüroğlu, 2013). This dialectical relationship continued to build, change, and develop texture through successive calls and responses. In conclusion, the LGBTI community brought its experiences of solidarity to the park, contributed to the awareness of intersections of oppression, and the movement was affected by the response of other groups who were open to understanding the members of the community.

#### *Stories of Solidarity & Trust: the Gezi Spirit*

In order to understand the implications of the protests on the LGBTI movement's advancement, it is crucial to comprehend what the Gezi Spirit actually means, and the most effective way to do that is to tell the stories the LGBTI protesters shared with me. Those were the moments my participants forgot about anything else, and told me about their stories with such passion and intensity that I felt like they almost went back to the moment of their experience, and I could not only hear, but also picture them as if they carried me to the moment as well, and those stories were happening in front of me. Because I do not want to take away anything from those narratives, I will provide long quotations in this section.

As a member of a community that has been oppressed both institutionally and socially during my entire life, I am at times forced to leave my scholarly distance aside and say outright that the absence of discrimination in Gezi was unbelievable. In a sense, my enthusiasm may seem to contradict with what my participants suggested (that the Gezi Spirit did not have much effect on them); however, it was not the creation of the Gezi Spirit, itself, that had a great effect on all protesters, but it was the impacts and stories that the spirit generated. For example, I asked my participant, Seda, who is the same person who claimed that the Gezi Spirit did not have much effect on her, whether she experienced any discrimination based on her sexual orientation. After a distinguishably long pause she expressed her feelings in a way that could probably explain what many LGBTI individuals felt in Gezi:

No, now that I think about it [smiles]. Wow, it's like a joke, but no. The only people we had negative problems with due to our sexual identity were the police [laughs]. Now that I think about it, yes it's like a joke. I think that's why Gezi is exactly a utopia for everybody. But it's a utopia that has become true [smiles].

The environment and solidarity among the people during Gezi was what the LGBTI community had been trying to achieve for two decades, and the fact that it happened so fast and spontaneously made it a dream that came true for those who experienced it. Before Gezi, many people were feeling helpless and desperate as the regime was taking away more and more rights from the people. After Gezi started, that feeling turned into excitement, surprise, empowerment, and hope. Trans Blok told me how she was planning to move to Berlin right before the protests, but when the resistance started she regained her hope and felt that she was not alone. One of the unforgettable stories she experienced in Gezi happened when the police surrounded her by tear gas, and forced her to either run towards the gas or surrender:

For a moment I considered running towards the police, because only on that side there was no gas. Instinctively, you want to run where there is no gas; it hurts a lot. I said, I can't run there, I will get inside the gas because there are people

ahead, behind the gas. I sprinted with my eyes closed. I have problems about trusting society as a trans person. I didn't trust society. I can't trust anyone who is not like me. That day I said, "Hold me," and ran overboldly. I said, someone will hold me. I'm running at full steam in Istiklal with my eyes closed... I was exposed to too much gas, I was about to fall. I stumbled and somebody held me, somebody I didn't know! I don't know if they were faggot, hetero, Kurd, Turk, or right-winged, but someone held me! It was amazing because I *knew* somebody was going to hold me! This is a feeling I experienced for the first time in my life on this land.

Her story reveals the extent of the trust and solidarity that developed between the protesters, and it was so strong for those who were actually in it that it almost felt like society became enlightened in one day (Trans Blok). This unexpected change in people's attitudes towards each other resulted from the fact that the people realized how powerful they were when they came together against the same oppressive system, and they were able to live in the same space despite their differences (Angelik). As a result, their similar struggles overcame their differences.

One of the most unforgettable experiences for the members of the LGBTI community must have been their interaction with the Anti-capitalist Muslims. Three of my participants mentioned the same story:

LGBT individuals became really close with them [Anti-capitalist Muslims] in Gezi. We were both so happy to get to know them after realizing that their viewpoint on LGBT was not like of those believers that we knew, and it was also a very nice experience to learn that there was an Islam like that... the anti-capitalist Muslims was a group that we came into contact for the first time and got really close to. For example, we built their masjid; LGBT individuals built their area of worship, the LGBT Blok did. While they were worshipping LGBT Blok guarded them. It was like a special day, Kandil [a religious day for Muslims] or something, LGBT individuals surrounded that area, surrounded the Anti-capitalists who were worshipping, and ensured their worship... there aren't many groups that are both Muslim and get this close to LGBT. We made the most compromise with the group that we would consider the most uncompromising in that space (E-bear).

Perhaps this is one of the best examples of the Gezi Spirit: sharing and helping the people whose ideas and viewpoints are completely different than yours without expecting anything back. This

unforgettable interaction between the members of two opposite groups was only one of many, and probably each person in Gezi had at least one similar story. Another significant alliance the LGBTI movement gained in Gezi was with socialist groups. As I mentioned previously, before Gezi many socialist groups saw LGBTI people as the product of Western capitalism that needed to be eliminated. As Tar's (2013) collection of interviews with prominent socialist groups after Gezi reveals, "socialist movements came in contact with the LGBTI movement late" (p. 31), but when they eventually did, their opinions started changing, and an important internal transformation process began for these movements. To illustrate, Trans Blok's reflection on this topic is beneficial to share:

There are quite radical left-wing groups. They think exactly the same as right-wing groups about homosexuality. They have reactionist, bigoted, medieval views. They say it [homosexuality] is perversion, disorder. Now even they have had a fracture. They have started saying "we are discussing homophobia and transphobia, would you join us as a speaker?" or "we have added homophobia and transphobia to our party thing [regulations] as well, now they are accepted as offence in our party too." These are magnificent things!

Both Tar's (2013) interviews with socialist groups and Trans Blok's experience demonstrate that Gezi's powerful effect started breaking even the strongest prejudices that had been rigidly rooted in some leftist groups' structures since the 80s (if not earlier) and had previously appeared impossible to change. Although my focus is on the changes for the LGBTI community during and after Gezi, some stories other oppressed groups experienced are also worth mentioning since it is the combination of those stories that created the Gezi Spirit. For example, a previously unimaginable picture would be the interaction between the Kurdish Independence movement activists and Turkish nationalists, one that surprised everybody who witnessed it, or saw its photos on social media. Because of the civil war between the Turkish army and Kurdish guerrillas since the 80s, the high tension between the Kurdish-Turkish nationalist groups had



always seemed impossible to overcome. However, as my participants mentioned several times, those groups slept next to each other with their differently-colored flags in Gezi. They had conflicts, but they talked to and understood each other; they discussed, and resolved their differences.

It should be clear at this point that as the protesters interacted with each other, they realized more and more clearly that their victimization was related to that of others; some people experienced multiple forms of oppression simultaneously, and those multiple categories were often linked to each other through complex relations. For example, it can be argued that when the socialist groups met trans women for the first time in the park, they became aware how their trans identities contributed directly to their low economic and social status. Consequently socialists became aware that it was not trans identities that were the problem, but their victimization by the same capitalist system these left-wing groups were strictly against. It would appear that this realization played a significant role in changing some socialist groups' perspective about LGBTI people. Consequently, the stories of the Gezi Spirit have influenced many people, so that all my participants agreed on one important conclusion: no matter what happens in the country, the interactions between the protesters contributed to the awareness of how multiple structures of oppression intersect/interlock and those who experienced Gezi have changed forever. This conclusion demonstrates that Gezi remains the hope for a more equal society among the millions of people who got involved in the resistance throughout the country.

#### *Normalization of LGBTI Individuals and Expansion of the LGBTI Movement*

As I argued above, Gezi Park provided a place where the marginalized and the prejudiced were able to meet and get to know each other, and the LGBTI community was introduced to many of the prejudiced individuals/groups for the first time during Gezi. My interviewees

generally asserted that the real change for the LGBTI community was not due to the internal changes in the LGBTI movement itself, but because of those outside it. As Seda suggested, the most crucial implication of the community's interaction with other groups seems to be the fact that many people realized what they previously thought about the members of the LGBTI community was based on stereotypes, and that the LGBTI individuals were "just like anyone else in the park," and as a result, awareness about the LGBTI issues increased. Another implication of this awareness is the LGBTI movement's notable expansion and generation of great momentum after Gezi.

Pratt (2004) explores Butler's theory of performativity, and she agrees with her that stigmatizing discourses surround us and it is impossible to avoid them. However, she argues that:

There are possibilities of subverting norms through each performance. Individuals are also produced by multiple, sometimes contradictory, discourses. Managing these contradictions, or bringing one discourse into relation with another can open points of resistance (p. 20).

Accordingly, homophobic and transphobic discourses surrounding LGBTI people position these individuals outside the norm by marginalizing them, but it is possible to reveal the contradictions of these discourses and by doing so to create resistance against stigmatization. For example, when the government authorities used common divisive discourses and stereotypes against certain groups of protesters, it became clear to the strongly united crowd of Gezi that those discourses conflicted with the reality experienced in Gezi, and even helped reveal their falseness. To illustrate, the media commonly present trans women as "dangerous" sex workers corrupting family values and threatening the police officers who are only trying to restore order at night. It is not a rare sight to see the news that show these sex workers with sticks in their hands yelling at

the police, with a headline: “Transvestite Terror” (Atasay, 2005). The news generally starts with this image with an otherwise biased approach or without any background story explaining how and why these women are outraged. Consequently, having no real interaction or knowledge of the other side of the story, many people in society perceive trans women with the stereotype presented by these discourses. In Gezi, people had the opportunity to meet trans individuals and hear their side of the story for the first time in “real life.” The image of trans women as violent and caring about nothing but sex was suddenly broken when they were viewed on top of the barricades defending the park with all their might just like “normal” protesters. Similarly, pro-Kurdish activists are often presented as terrorists by the media, the government, and even by some scholars and the independence struggle of the Kurds in the Eastern part of the country is portrayed as an ungrateful riot supported by external forces (Kuzu, 2005). However, the common discourse that the Kurds are “terrorists” for resisting police violence did not make sense anymore when all Gezi protestors were essentialized and declared to be terrorists, for the same reasons, by the government and the mainstream media. Consequently, not only the LGBTI community, but also some other marginalized groups were normalized in the eyes of their comrades. E-bear described his perception that the viewpoint of people about LGBTI individuals and their issues started changing in Gezi as the members of the community were not marginalized anymore, but “normalized” among the protesters:

To begin with, I saw that heterosexuals were able to comprehend homosexuals for the first time there... then, it made me so happy to see that they realized that they were unaware of how brave and combatant homosexuals were, and that their struggle had been going on for such a long time... it was such a nice thing seeing the change in the heterosexual community’s approach towards homosexuals in practice... so many people realized that male homosexuality does not mean the stereotypical passive, feminine gay, or that lesbians are not all tomboys (E-bear).

It is important to emphasize two words here: “in practice” because that was exactly what Gezi Park provided to the LGBTI community: a stage to perform everything the movement had been discussing and striving for, in theory, for two decades, and the possibility to put all those theories into practice. Such an opportunity is very difficult to create for many social justice movements no matter how hard they work to achieve it. The spontaneity of the Gezi incidents produced that opportunity unexpectedly, and the LGBTI community’s performance during the protests and the meaningful interactions it was able to create with other groups generated fruitful results. The stereotypical imaginary of LGBTI individuals in many people’s minds were replaced by the “real” images they witnessed in Gezi. Seda stated that this normalization was an important achievement that saved the LGBTI movement a significant amount of time and effort:

Locally in Istanbul, inside Gezi, there was nobody left untouched. Viewpoints of people started changing when they saw the famous crazy [LGBTI individual] of the classic stories everywhere: at the resistance, at the barricades, etc., throwing the tear gas cartridge back with a rainbow flag in their hand... It is a fact that we advanced three years in one month in terms of consciousness, in terms of conscious statements like “huh, apparently these LGBTI people did not have three ears; they were one of us,” or “huh, how ignorant I was saying these things!” As I said, with this pace it would have taken us three years to reach that point.

Contrary to what many people thought before Gezi, this active resistance from the members of the LGBTI community resulted in the surprising realization that LGBTI individuals were not only interested in sexuality, nor their own issues; they were “as good as” any other protester. As Seda pointed out, without the opportunity for face-to-face interaction it would have taken the movement years of work (and I would say three years is an optimistic guess) to achieve this level of consciousness. The bar of awareness was raised to a certain point, and it could not go back to what it had been before anymore (Trans Blok).

The transformation in people’s views on LGBTI issues produced another unexpected result for the movement; the same pace was reflected in the movement’s expansion and strength.

The more support the LGBTI community received, the more visible and stronger it became. All of my participants mentioned the high number of people who joined the Istanbul Pride march that year. The day of the march, two weeks after the protesters were dispersed from Gezi Park, seemed to offer proof of a new dynamics in the LGBTI movement. Before I quote the pride experiences of my participants, I should mention that the pride marches in Turkey are a lot different than the ones I have seen in North America; there is no cortege, division of official participants vs. the audience, or any commercial organization/company advertising their sponsorship during the marches. The people cover the streets, chant, dance, sing, and walk all together in support of the LGBTI community and their struggle for social justice. Anyone who is there adds another voice to the call for equality, and this is why the number of people who joined the pride march in 2013 mattered so much to the community. Trans Blok mentioned the day of the pride march, how crowded and beautiful it was, and one image that stayed in her mind from that day:

There was a hairy, huge man with his daughter, a little girl in pink skirt, and his wife under his arm. The man didn't have upper body clothes, put on fiery red lipstick, and made moustaches to his wife and daughter. He is probably, not even probably, he is a heterosexual man... but he doesn't say "I'm faggot," he says, "I'm with you..." he didn't abstain from putting on red lipstick; he didn't care about being perceived as a faggot.

The strong performance of this particular family was quite disruptive of the norms; the presence of an eager heterosexual "family man" among the "faggots" with such a performance despite the prominent homophobia, transphobia and sexism in society was a powerful and significant statement not only against homophobia and transphobia, but also gendered divisions and misogyny. Such a high scale of support and solidarity from non-LGBTI groups and individuals were very unusual for the community. E-bear also talked about the pride march, and he stated that while most heterosexual people who were there would have been reluctant to join the march

for fear of being perceived as gay before the resistance, they started joining the marches proudly after Gezi; this newly authorized participation must be the first proof of the implications of Gezi for the LGBTI movement. Naturally, the increase of the support also increased LGBTI visibility and the awareness of LGBTI issues. Because the Gezi resistance was unplanned and once the incidents started, decisions regarding what actions to take had to be made and implemented quickly; every experience in Gezi was accelerated, and it also accelerated the pace of social change (Çiçek). Each of my participants shared the perception that now that this much has been achieved, now that there is large amount of people from various backgrounds that support social justice for the LGBTI community, the movement will keep going forward.

### 3.3.2 Photo Analysis & Conclusion



Figure 3 – Retrieved From: <http://technosociology.org/?p=1421>

Sufism is a spiritual practice that derives from Islam and focuses on self-reform. One of the most notable characteristics of the practice is the presence of the whirling dervish, who is a

devotee that dedicates their life to cleansing the soul through a dancing ritual. Another important point to emphasize about Sufism is the fact that it did not merely emerge as a religious practice, but it “would evolve within an environment rife with the chaos, discord, strife and internal wars” that produced several social injustices, so it “included certain political, social and cultural factors (Hanieh, 2011). To illustrate, a whirling dervish does not aim to reach the Divine only through personal perfection, but “by revolving in harmony with all things in nature [...] intentionally and consciously participates in the shared revolution of other beings,” returning from his journey “able to love and serve the whole of creation and all creatures without discriminating in regard to belief, class, or race” (The Whirling Dervishes of Rumi, n.d.). The image of the non-traditional whirling dervish in the photo above was taken during Gezi, and the performance was delivered by a performer of “*Devlet Opera ve Balesi*” (The State Opera and Ballet). The image became one of the most notable visual representations of the Gezi protester for several reasons. To begin with, just like the origins of Sufism, it appeared during a time when chaos, social injustices, and internal conflicts were prevalent in Turkey, and just as Sufism offered a larger revolution through self-awareness and self-reform, the Gezi Spirit promised a collective consciousness through achieving a similar awareness of political, social and cultural injustices without discriminating against anyone. This being the case historically, an exploration of the parallels and differences between the Sufi dervish and the performer in this iconic photo of Gezi reveals more symbolic meanings for the Gezi protester and the Gezi Spirit.

According to Sufism, a whirling dervish starts the ritual wearing a black coat and a turban on their head. The black coat is the symbol of ego, while the turban symbolizes a tombstone. When the dervish takes off the coat a white dress is revealed, which symbolizes a shroud, and which means that the dervish has died before death, been purified of their ego, and are reborn

with knowledge of the truth (HaberKonya, 2011; Hilal Semazen Grubu, n.d.). The choice of clothing in the nontraditional whirling dervish in the photo above, a gas mask and a pink skirt, is quite different than that of a Sufi dervish, but its symbolism seems to be equally rich. The gas mask they are wearing gives them the identity of a protester, and this is the only identity they take on during the performance, and so, in order not to attain any other identity to the representative protester, I choose to use the pronoun “they” while referring to this single whirling dervish/protester. Accordingly, the choice of their skirt color, pink, their bare chest and shaved armpits appear to be a refusal of the gender stereotype “his” sex is supposed to undertake, relieving the protester of their gender. The absence of an upper cloth is a statement that, just as the traditional meaning suggests, the protester is reborn, purified of their ego and previous prejudices; it complements the lack of any other identity the gas mask refers to.

Furthermore, unlike the traditional whirling dervish who raises an open hand to the sky and opens the other one to the ground, which symbolizes taking from god and giving to his creations, the whirling protester opens both of their arms in an inviting way that may be interpreted as a symbol of the call and response relationship I have described; the protester will both receive what is offered to them, and give back what they can. Their performance seems to be the embodiment of both the Gezi Spirit and Rumi’s (the founder of Sufism) famous poem:

*Come, come, whoever you are,  
Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving - it doesn't matter,  
Ours is not a caravan of despair.  
Come, even if you have broken your vow a hundred times.  
Come, come again, come* (Rumi, trans. n.d./1990).



Just as Rumi invites anyone to join the effort of self-liberation as well as collective revolution against the turmoil and injustices of his time, the protester with their open arms seems to be inviting people to respond to the Gezi Spirit's call for the same purpose. The performance of the non-traditional whirling dervish reflects the Gezi Spirit so precisely that it became one of the symbols of the understanding and solidarity between the protesters, and it instigated a campaign to join Gezi: "*Sen de Gel*" (You too, Come). The image of a whirling dervish with a gas mask and rainbow colors became the invitation card of the 2013 Istanbul Pride week, with a note underneath that said: "You too, come!" The individual interactions protesters formed with each other, the consciousness raised on the intersections of oppression, and the dialectical relationship between the constituents of Gezi were the core points of solidarity that carried the hope that would lead to liberation for everybody who experienced Gezi. It is difficult to know for sure to what extent the image of the whirling dervish contributed to the success of the pride march. However, the fact that several groups and individuals took up the LGBTI community's call, and joined the pride march that year, making it one of the biggest pride marches held in Eastern Europe, seems to suggest that what the whirling dervish brought out concrete results. Although all of my interview participants agreed that the pride march was the most visible evidence of the improvements in the LGBTI movement, its success was only the first indication of many future achievements that would come after Gezi. The next two sections will focus on some of the other most significant changes in the movement.

### 3.4 Gezi as an Educational Field

The uniqueness of the Gezi Park resistance as a catalyst for change did not result primarily from the times the protesters clashed with the police, but more from the moments when protesters were interacting with each other and creating new meanings together in the park; Gezi was an activism workshop (Çiçek). Since the protesters were open to listening to the opinions and new ideas of others in the park, the lessons learnt during Gezi had powerful transformative effects on people. Apart from raising awareness about the intersections of oppression, the significance of which was worth discussing in its own separate section, there are three other important implications of these lessons for the LGBTI movement: 1) dismantling the sexist, homophobic, and transphobic discourses; 2) the new model of activism introduced by the LGBTI community that drew attention and gained more support to the movement; and 3) the realization of internal insufficiencies in the LGBTI movement. In this section, I investigate the ways my participants took part in and/or observed the activism in the park, and how they interpreted the implications of the lessons learnt both by the larger Gezi protesters and the LGBTI community. As the interview analysis explores most of the important points regarding this topic, my observations serve as supporting points, integrated into the interviews and the photograph analysis, while the photograph analysis section provides one additional point to the discussion.

#### *3.4.1 Interviews*

##### *Dismantling of Oppressive Discourses as a Way of Empowerment*

As I asserted in the previous section, systems of oppression are created and maintained not only by the dominant powers that benefit from this domination, but also by those without power (Pratt, 2004). The most effective tools of domination are the invisible ones as they are

naturalized and form the basis of all concrete impacts of oppression. Because of their naturalization in our daily lives, we fail to see their strength, or the ways we contribute to their continuity. One such tool is language, through which the ideologies of the majority are controlled and sustained. According to Pratt, discourse produces subjects and it is used to regulate and maintain power relations through othering and stigmatizing some identities, such as sexual minorities. Even though it is impossible to avoid these discourses, Butler (as cited in Pratt, 2004) suggests, we have the “possibility of reworking the very conventions by which we are enabled” (p. 20). When explored in conversation with Pratt and Butler, Freire’s (2005) suggestion of a way to resist these discourses finds additional meaning. Freire argues that by reflecting on the meanings of the language we use in our everyday lives we can strengthen ourselves and find ways to transform oppressive acts and meanings (Freire, 2005). This way of resistance and the consequent transformation of discourses could be observed in Gezi; the efforts of the feminist groups and the LGBTI community helped reveal hidden oppressive meanings behind the language used by protesters as well as creating alternative discourses and ways to communicate collectively. Thanks to the protesters’ eagerness to listen and understand each other, this goal was achieved in a short time and to a large extent.

This change was so noteworthy that all of my five participants mentioned their experiences and observations around the issue. During the first days of the protests there were many protesters using slang words such as *ibne* (faggot) and *orospu çocuğu* (son of a whore) as a way to swear at the government. The feminist and LGBTI movements quickly realized the necessity of emphasizing the connection between discourse and oppression and they immediately started working to explain why using these words in those ways was harmful both verbally and in writing (Durgun, 2013). The activists from both movements organized several events and

meetings with other groups in order to discuss the harmful effects of repeating these dominant discourses. They communicated directly and efficiently with these groups. In time, even some of the most radical right-wing groups started to realize the power of these words and worked on changing them (Trans Blok). For example, E-bear mentioned how the word “faggot” is often used to swear at referees during football games in Turkey and claimed that as a result of the LGBTI community’s interactions with the football fans and its efforts to raise awareness about the oppressive use of language, even this tradition was broken:

A lot of things have changed. Gezi had an effect on, how should I say [thinks]... because all communities affected each other in Gezi, it affected their lives after Gezi as well. For example, there aren’t homophobic slogans at Besiktas Carsi’s games anymore... not just them, Galatasaray, Fenerbahce either. Their fan groups joined [the protests] as well.

I believe it would be overly optimistic and/or pretentious to claim that homophobic, transphobic and sexist language was erased from all areas of all protesters’ lives, but the extent to which the LGBTI and feminist communities interacted, especially with the football fans of Besiktas, seems to have had a permanent effect in at least some areas of those people’s use of language. For example, Seda talked about one of her experiences during a march when the protesters used the word “faggot” while cheering, and it was someone else that they did not even know who warned the cheering group and walked around the crowd saying “friends, please don’t use sexist language; don’t use the language of hegemony.” Seda added smiling: “we never heard the slogan ‘faggot Tayyip’ again.” Apart from verbal warnings among the protesters, the LGBTI activists and feminist groups also had effective projects for creating a new discourse. They organized workshops to explain how derogatory language was used to sustain systems of oppression, found alternative words and slogans instead of the oppressive ones, and walked around the area erasing and changing derogatory words in existing graffiti. In time, it was the protestors who had

previously used that language that worked to change their discourses and use the alternative ones in their place. Through its activism in the park, the LGBTI community shared ways to identify and challenge interconnected forms of oppression, and helped create a non-oppressive discourse collectively (Durgun, 2013; Hüröğlu, 2013), a process which Freire (2005) describes as *conscientization*, the first step to liberation.

### *New Model of Activism*

Another implication of the LGBTI community's efforts in the park was due to its introduction of a new model of activism during Gezi, which was unusual and more attractive to many groups in the park. This non-hierarchical, non-centralized activism model seems to be one of the intriguing reasons that provided more support to the LGBTI movement. To illustrate, Çiçek claimed that the LGBTI movement helped create a different tone in many other movement's ways of activism by introducing their own, and this unusual tone gained more support for the movement:

In social movements in Turkey, there is this approach: "this is my area, there is going to be certain politics here. Those who will do other kind of politics should go elsewhere." An awareness of coming together, doing different politics next to each other, standing together is perceived as betraying their political ideologies... these qualities had already existed in our movement; because of this aspect the LGBTI movement was already different than other movements... because our movement was like that it attracts people right now, because I think people liked that during the Gezi resistance (Çiçek).

Her statement is like an affirmation that different groups in Gezi Park realized the importance of standing together despite differences and the fact that the LGBTI movement contributed to this realization not only by activism, but also by introducing their own similar model to the larger Gezi movement. As I explained above, all LGBTI organizations and even smaller initiatives,

such as university groups, are accepted as equal constituents of the LGBTI movement<sup>1</sup>, and each group takes part in collective discussions and decision-making through annual gatherings and more immediate communication tools. Because of this unity and decentralized organization model, emerging tensions are resolved relatively quickly in the movement, and the atmosphere is generally humorous and lively. The Occupy Gezi movement had a similar organization, although more experienced groups acted as leaders from time to time, it happened naturally as no group tried to impose their presence or ideologies upon others. Participants described a movement in which no group was singled out, all decisions were made collectively and tensions were resolved through discussion.

When I asked Seda why she thought the political activism of the movement was effective during Gezi, she brought up a different aspect and suggested that the new generation had been tired of the serious tone of politics, and they saw a different model in the LGBTI movement:

Because the LGBT movement always stays young, it adapts itself to today's conditions, and this is a political approach they haven't seen before, you know? Maybe we have seen humorous slogans in 1-2 feminist demonstrations, but the LGBTI movement has so many humorous ones. This makes people happy. I think people just want to be happy. When I observe the LGBTI movement from the outside, I think its general effect is this.

The word "happy" is important to reflect on because Seda was not my only participant who used the same word to describe the mood of the protests and protesters' motivation to be supporters of the LGBTI movement. Çiçek, for example, mentioned that more and more people joined the pride marches not only to support the movement, but also because the atmosphere made them "happy." But what did being happy mean to the protesters? As I argued in the previous section, many young people in Turkey were brought up apolitical with the fear of being part of a violent

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<sup>1</sup> This seems to be changing after the sudden and significant expansion of the movement with the foundation of "conflicting" LGBTI formations, such as nationalist and conservative ones. I will discuss this more in detail in Chapter 4.

political division, but the way the LGBTI movement did politics was outside this usual, serious, and strict model of politics that scared many people. The members of the community showed that for a movement to be organized and successful it does not need to be hierarchical or centralized, and that important issues could involve humour. The more the people witnessed this different style of organization, the less afraid and the happier they were to be involved in politics, and to be supporters of the LGBTI movement. For example, E-bear talked about one of the most commonly used Gezi slogans that was started by the LGBTI community and adopted by almost all groups during the protests; one group would start cheering “*neredesin aşkım?*” (where are you, darling?), the second group would cheer back “*buradayım aşkım!*” (here I am, darling!). He stated that whenever a group started a violent, militarist, or politically incorrect slogan, the LGBTI community would try and change the mood by using this humorous one. In this sense, the start of this cheering can be seen as the call from the LGBTI community to the rest of Gezi protesters, aiming to transform an oppressive situation into a uniting one not through strict arguments, but through a fun reminder of the purpose of the Gezi Spirit. Considering the fact that even famous musicians in Turkey used this slogan during their concerts (Taş, 2013), one even made a song containing the cheering (Narman & Özdemir, 2014), and it became a well-known slogan among many different groups throughout the country, the observations of Seda, Çiçek and E-bear support the idea that a different model of doing politics was introduced by the members of the LGBTI community during Gezi, and they drew attention and produced a response to the community’s call. The freedom of doing politics without being restricted by a centralized leadership or serious rules was attractive mostly to the new generation that had been tired of divisive, strict politics and as a result the people supported and wanted to be a part of this new model of activism. Many protesters joined the protests because they were frustrated and angry

due to more and more restrictions and authoritarian rules adopted by the conservative government, but it appears that the reason they stayed despite harsh police violence was because they were happy to be there. In this sense, happiness for many protesters meant being able to express themselves and let others express themselves without fearing judgment or division. As a result, the LGBTI community was not only able to raise consciousness about oppressive discourses, but it was also able to introduce an alternative way of communicating in its place, one that was not violent, scary, or insulting to any group, one that was inclusive and made people happy to be part of the change.

Both Trans Blok and Angelik mentioned the LGBTI movement's culture of sharing resources unconditionally, and pointed out that the crowd in Gezi adopted the same social and cultural organization style:

There was no money in the park, there was no money anywhere; it was exchange style. Everybody was sharing whatever they had. You would give them cigarette, they would give you watermelon, etc. I think we showed something to the world with that: "see, it is possible to live like this" (Trans Blok).

We were sharing everything [in Gezi], but the LGBTI movement has always been like this. At least to a certain extent we have been able to break the understanding of private property the system imposes upon us, as it develops in our social lives as well. We have the same understanding in sheltering. If somebody doesn't have a home, everybody opens their doors for that person. We experienced the same thing in Gezi (Angelik).

This culture of solidarity and giving to the community without expectations was a significant factor in generating the Gezi Spirit. Unlike what the system would have the people believe, this social and cultural organization style showed to the protesters that sharing what they had and building coalitions did not take away from their resources, but rather exactly the opposite. Sharing empowered every group and individual in Gezi by providing access to a greater and more diverse amount of resources. Considering my participants' statements, it can be argued that



Gezi was to some extent produced as a broader embodiment of the LGBTI movement. Gezi adopted the movement's non-hierarchical, decentralized and humorous political organization style by adopting a social and cultural organization that was built on solidarity.

*Internal Lessons Learnt by the LGBTI Movement*

It is true that the LGBTI movement had already been conscious of a range of different issues, and it differed from other political groups in Gezi because of its activism model, but my interviewees illustrated a perception that the movement yet had much to learn about inclusion. Once again, in this case, Gezi was a great teacher of the call and response relationship; the community learned from its experiences as much as it contributed to this “activism workshop.” In fact, Gezi and its aftermath has initiated strong internal conflicts and struggles in the LGBTI movement, which represents one of the most significant challenges the community has faced since the beginning of 1990s (as I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 4). When I asked my participants whether they faced any problems in Gezi or not, one of them could not recall any problems, but each of the others mentioned that they had some issues because of the new LGBTI recruits that joined the movement in the park. Both E-bear and Angelik stated that they had to sit down and talk to some people in the park because of problems the new recruits caused. The new LGBTI activist who just started being involved in politics during Gezi, Çiçek explained, did not have the two decades of experience, or the same level of political awareness the currently-existing LGBTI groups and organizations did, and so their acts or statements were sometimes sexist, nationalist, or even biphobic/transphobic. My participants explained this tension as a natural result of the movement's growth, and added that it takes time for people to learn and improve themselves. They assumed that the new activists and movements would soon catch up with the experienced organizations. Although I am also optimistic that the tensions will be

worked through, it is perhaps more important for the experienced activists to reflect on and discuss the roots of the issue among the experienced activists themselves. Trans Blok's statement revealed that at least some activists were aware of the internal issue that caused this problem:

When they [new recruits] first came [to the park], we were electrified. We say 'heterosexist, patriarchal system' etc., they say, "what are you talking about?" We [realized we] have become too politicized, too reserved, our language has changed too much; we have become distant to that base. We were electrified that day. That was a great thing; it was a great experience to have our self-criticism.

In fact, during the time I was involved in the LGBTI movement in Turkey, I often complained about this one-sided politics that unconsciously and unintentionally pushed new recruits away; the movement had covered such a long distance in political consciousness since the 1990s. The politics that were being discussed by the movement were not relevant to a certain crowd whose socio-political background was completely different than the general LGBTI activist population. It is not surprising that when that crowd joined the experienced activists, the clash electrified the LGBTI movement, and it helped them realize what it lacked. "To me, that was also a resistance," Angelik remarked, emphasizing the internal struggle this union created, or more accurately the struggle it revealed.

### 3.4.2 Photo Analysis

#### *Park Forums & Activism in the Park*



Figure 4 – Retrieved from: <http://www.kaosgl.com/page.php?id=14558>

Apart from the significant implications of the lessons learned and taught by the LGBTI movement in Gezi, some other ways the community took part in the production of these lessons, and the activism that was performed are also worth mentioning. The photo above is from a park where people would come together and discuss politics, their issues, and suggest solutions in an open concept forum. One of E-bear's statements revealed the extent to which the LGBTI community actively took part in park forums and used them as an effective way to communicate the issues and politics of the movement to the crowd:

We often organized movie screenings and discussion sessions at our stand. Moreover, we organized collaborative forums with other groups, as well as small, internal forums for ourselves. We didn't limit ourselves only with Gezi Park; LGBT individuals visited other parks as well. For example, we even went to the

opposite shore<sup>1</sup> to Kadıköy, Abbasağa Park, to Kocamustafapaşa Forum, to everywhere. We organized forums with people in those places.

Examining E-bear's statement together with the photograph above may provide a better picture of the significance of the LGBTI community's dedication to doing activism during Gezi. As it can be seen in the photo, everybody would gather in a circle, and whoever would like to speak would go to the middle of the circle and raise their opinions during a park forum. In this way, the setting of the gathering would indicate that no matter what one's background or social class was, everybody in the park was equal, and that every person's opinion mattered. The photo is just one of many proofs that each workshop and/or park forum would draw a large number of protesters, and no matter how crowded an event would get, there would be no uproar in the crowd.

Everybody would focus their attention on the speaker and take turns making their own statements. The fact that hundreds of park forums were organized in Istanbul alone and that there was a LGBTI activist in almost all park forums talking to a large crowd that was ready and eager to understand what each speaker had to say reveals the extent of the awareness the LGBTI community may have raised about issues that they needed participants to address. E-bear's statement also suggests that in addition to the community's extensive participation in general park forums, LGBTI activists also organized collaborative forums that were open to everybody who wanted to join discussions regarding the community's issues and internal forums where activists would reflect on their experiences and engage in discussions to improve the LGBTI movement. Even after the protesters were removed from Gezi Park by the police forces, the protesters kept meeting in several other parks around the country, and park forums were sustained as another important chapter of the resistance for a long while.

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<sup>1</sup> Istanbul has land in both Asian and European continents. "Opposite shore" (*karşı yaka*) for Istanbulites refers to the other continent, depending on where they are situated. In this case, because Gezi Park is in the European side, "opposite shore" refers to Asia.

Apart from the community's activism in park forums, the LGBT Blok's stand worked effectively as an information table (Angelik). Activist families of LGBTI individuals organized information sessions for people who had questions, members of the community took over the main stage in the park and told people about LGBTI issues, and activists organized several events and marches with their rainbow flags around the area. All these efforts reveal an LGBTI community that saw the open and free environment of Gezi as an opportunity to raise awareness and improve solidarity among oppressed groups as much as possible.

### *3.4.3 Conclusion*

Gezi started as an uprising against the government and transformed into an educational field where the protesters learned from each other. Members of the LGBTI community shared their experiences regarding their identity, tried to show to the crowd how their victimization was connected to the other forms of oppression, presented solutions and opened up discussions about LGBTI issues. Their joint efforts with feminist activists helped several protesters realize the power of resistance to heteronormative discourse. Moreover, while other social movements in Gezi learned from the unusual activism model of the LGBTI movement, the movement itself learnt from the new activists that the way the community did politics was not inclusive towards everybody, and it responded by beginning to discuss new ways to address this deficiency. All these points, taken together support the contention that the achievements of the LGBTI movement that followed Gezi cannot be attributed only to the uniting environment of Gezi or to the interactions the community had with other groups, but also to the passionate activism that was performed by LGBTI activists. This is also why it is crucial to discuss all these contributing factors and effects together in order to produce a more complete picture while investigating the post-Gezi LGBTI movement.

### 3.5 LGBTI Visibility During and After Gezi & Its Implications

Invisibilization can be an effective strategy in an oppressive system for keeping marginalized communities powerless. When something is largely unknown, it is easy to give its presence negative meaning and to present it as a source of danger to the majority. An example of this strategy would be the presentation of trans sex workers as indecent and violent through the use of mainstream media. In this sense, the fear of the majority against a minority group becomes an effective way to maintain this invisibility by shifting the threat to the minority. For LGBTI individuals, it creates the “closet” (Currier, 2012). This systemic invisibilization of the LGBTI community in Turkey had been one of the most efficient strategies of the Turkish state; it was a way to avoid the demands of the LGBTI movement and keep the movement’s resources immobilized. At the same time, it enabled the control of the majority’s opinion with negative discourses about this minority group, making it “vulnerable to erasure and marginalization” (Casper & Moore, 2009, p. 9). For these reasons, increasing visibility is one of the most important steps in gaining recognition and more power on the way to achieving equality for the LGBTI movement as well as any other social movement that has been made invisible.

All four themes I have discussed above, including the previous political and social experience of the LGBTI resistance, Gezi Park as a queer space, individual interactions and the awareness of intersections of oppression in Gezi, and Gezi as an educational field, are results of the call and response process that I have described: the spontaneous inception of Gezi interacted with the organized movements’ effective strategies both before and during the Gezi Park protests, creating the Gezi Spirit and providing several opportunities to all groups during the resistance. The last theme, LGBTI visibility during and after Gezi and its implications, is itself mainly an implication (response) to the previous themes (call), because every success during

Gezi resulted in contributions to that significant step, towards visibility. Therefore, the discussions I will have in this section are mostly about the post-Gezi period and the significant changes to the LGBTI movement after the increase in visibility the protests provided to the community. In order to investigate these implications, I focus on both internal and external changes in the movement. Because I have not been involved in the LGBTI community in the post-Gezi period, my personal observations are significantly limited on this theme. However my position as the researcher provided me with the distance of an outsider's view on the strategies and changes in the LGBTI movement while my intimate knowledge as an insider on pre-Gezi helped me examine these implications more thoroughly. For these reasons, my integrated observations are an important part of my data analysis. In order to position the timeline and the progression of the events in a logical order, I did not allocate separate sections for the analysis of interviews and visual representation.

### *3.5.1 Interviews & Visual Representation*

#### *New LGBTI Activists and Organizations & the Expansion of the LGBTI Movement*



Figure 5 – Retrieved from: <http://www.glaad.org/blog/lgbt-organizations-turkey-participate-and-are-accepted-gezi-park-protests>

One of the important opportunities visibility provides to a social movement is the ability of that movement to attract new recruits (Currier, 2012). The more visible a social movement is, the more possible it is for the members of that community to feel safe and confident enough to declare themselves as subjects of their own struggle. In the U.S. during the gay and lesbian liberation movement, the need for visibility is why coming out of the closet was used as an efficient “strategy to transform private gender- and sexual- minority subjectivities into public LGBT collective identities around which they could mobilize” (Armstrong, 2002; Chabot and Duyvendak, 2002, as cited in Currier, 2012). Although the LGBTI movement in Turkey has always acknowledged the importance of coming out, it also recognized that each individual comes from a different background and each of those backgrounds come with different cultural dynamics and limitations. For example, for some individuals coming out may pose the threat of being subjected to violence not only committed by strangers, but also to honour killings



committed by family members. The movement emphasized the importance of visibility through principles such as providing interviews to the public only through publicly open LGBTI activists. Coming out has always been perceived as a personal choice, and it has never been adopted as a collective strategy by the movement in Turkey. In this sense, the visibility explosion during Gezi came as a surprise to the community. When I asked about the new activists that joined the LGBTI movement during Gezi, E-bear stated that the large number of new activists was the most crucial point of expansion for the movement:

I have been in the movement for 15 years, and I saw people I had never seen in my life before there [in Gezi], and thanks to Gezi, they became political by interacting with each other. So much so that, so many new organizations, so many new activists emerged. Their emergence made the LGBTI community so visible that people started not to fear; they started coming out of their closets, and it kept snowballing.

Meeting other LGBTI individuals who were open and determined and interacting with and learning from each other gave more confidence to many new individuals who were previously hesitant to be involved in the movement. The more visible the movement became, the more recruits joined the movement, and these new activists created many new organizations as they saw the need for a different formation. Trans Blok explained this explosion of coming out as a result of the “solidarity spirit.” According to her, people realized the importance of building coalitions and standing together, and they felt the happiness that this unity provided. Moreover, these new recruits also realized that they did not have to share the same ideology with one another to be involved in the same movement. Angelik pointed out that Gezi changed the general profile of LGBTI activists:

Afterwards, Gezi also changed this thing... the situation that LGBTI activists were middle-class university students or university graduates, doesn't matter if they were Turkish or Kurdish, this middle-class situation changed after Gezi. This is also something I really like. Because while it is so easy for someone in the middle-class culture to go to a [LGBTI] organization, someone who is from a

different economic class and shaping their cultural class along with this [economic class] simultaneously, may have significant reservations entering that space. These prejudices were also broken in Gezi Park.

As Angelik points out, while the movement consisted of mostly middle class university students or graduates before Gezi, individuals from more diverse backgrounds joined the movement.

Evidently, middle-class, educated individuals had more economic and social resources and accessibility to take part in sexual/gender identity politics. The realization of the importance of standing together and the existence of various ideologies among the members of the community provided the new activists the opportunity to form new groups and organizations throughout the country, bringing these diverse individuals and groups from different economic and social class within the movement together. To illustrate, all my participants held up the Hêvî LGBTI Initiative, which is the first and only LGBTI group that specifically defines itself as a Kurdish formation, as an example of the diverse organizations created during and after Gezi. Although Çiçek and Seda agreed that there were impressive amounts of new LGBTI groups and organizations throughout the country, they also seemed to think that the LGBTI movement had problems incorporating the new LGBTI individuals into the movement after Gezi. While it is probably true that not all LGBTI protesters joined the movement after the protests, I also believe that my participants' conflicting thoughts are the result of the high number of new formations that most of the new recruits united under; it is not that most of the new community members left the movement after the protests, but they found themselves in new groups in which they could more closely associate. For example, despite her remarks about the inability of the movement to recruit new activists, Çiçek felt that she had more ability to contribute to the movement in personally meaningful ways thanks to the high number of new activists who reduced the amount of work that needed to be done in the movement. Furthermore, all my participants mentioned

excitedly that countless new LGBTI groups were founded in several cities that had no local activists before. E-bear stated that this was one of the most satisfying results of being involved in the movement:

There used to be a few organizations in Turkey. If you counted the activists from these organizations it wouldn't be more than 50-60 people. It's great coming from that point and reaching to a hundred thousand, bringing that many people out to the pride... there are a few organizations in Kurdistan as well now. There used to be none, I mean apart from the big cities there were no organizations. Now the movement is creating a domino effect.

The significance of these local organizations for the improvement of the movement is undeniable, because they make the struggle more collective and raise awareness about the LGBTI issues locally (E-bear). Although it is not the main focus of this thesis, it is important to mention the fact that many new groups and organizations were founded even in conservative eastern towns after Gezi, and this is an indicator that the Gezi protests and their effects were not limited to Istanbul (Seda), and also that while discussing the improvements in the LGBTI movement in Istanbul's local, it should also be kept in mind that it is hard to talk about local LGBTI movements strictly distinct from the larger LGBTI movement in Turkey because the activists maintain a network of close communication and interaction, keeping each other informed about their local politics and discussions, and make decisions about important matters collectively.

#### *The Increase in Support and Solidarity for the LGBTI Movement*

Many LGBTI activists would agree that one of the most important implications of the Gezi Park protests for the LGBTI movement is the drastic increase in solidarity and support for the movement by other social and political groups that participated in Gezi, as well as by those who watched the protests closely. As I argued previously, the LGBTI community's theoretical and practical contributions to Gezi were among the primary factors that transformed prejudice

into solidarity. In the photo above, a LGBTI Gezi protester is standing alone on top of a barricade and waving his rainbow flag while some other protesters are strengthening the barricade and waiting for a police attack. It is clear that the presence of LGBTI protesters and/or the rainbow flag is a familiar sight at the barricades, as none of the protesters seem to be showing any interest in the protester waving his flag. Apart from the rainbow colors, there is no visible difference between any of the protesters. The image of LGBTI activists on top of or behind barricades with their rainbow flags was such a common site to witness during the protests that it became one of the symbols of the LGBTI resistance, and it even showed up on Istanbul Pride Week's posters and flyers (see Figure 1A). Similar moments like this also created such strong visibility that it became impossible for anyone who witnessed Gezi to deny LGBTI existence. This LGBTI visibility, both during the calm hours of the protests in the park and during the bodily resistance at the barricades, was perceived by my participants as important in several ways. To begin with, Angelik stated that people realized that the LGBTI community was not made up of a bunch of bourgeois people; the people saw what LGBTI individuals could do on the streets and at the barricades. Even the people who did not directly interact with them became aware of the LGBTI community's presence:

Of course there were people who did not come to the Blok to interact with us, but we showed everybody that LGBTI individuals were there as well, and that we were there with our colors and we were resisting too. We made them understand our main text: our right to live. We want to live, just like you do... nobody wanted to see or accept us politically, or even our existence. We've been experiencing existential denial for hundreds of years. You know how politics is a tool to make people accept our existence? We tore down a field that had been trying to prevent us from using that tool.

As Angelik points out, LGBTI visibility during the protests was too clear for any observer to continue denying the existence of LGBTI individuals. The more the other protest groups, as well as non-protesters, saw the determined resistance of the LGBTI community, such as during

moments like the above photograph represents, the more they became aware of the presence, problems and claims of the LGBTI movement. In Trans Blok's words, "they were able to see that LGBTI individuals were constituents of this society, a part of this society." As a result, several other groups in the park and those who were watching the protests closely started showing solidarity and support for the LGBTI movement, whose members were newly perceived as *just like them* with issues similar to their own. For example, both Çiçek and Seda talked about one of the most surprising and unforgettable moments of Gezi for them:

We were a handful of people, like 6 or 7 people, but we had a huge rainbow flag [smiles]. Suddenly tear gas was thrown at us, people started running... we were walking towards backside with our flag calmly, trying to breathe. All of a sudden people started applauding us [smiles]. It was such a strange experience. I looked at the windows; there were people at their windows, applauding us like crazy!

Seda's experience is an indicator that the LGBTI community gained incredible support not only from other protesters, but also from non-protesters who witnessed the community's efforts and contributions during Gezi. That moment was so unusual that it took a while for Çiçek to believe that people really did know the meaning of the rainbow flag, and they were really applauding for them. LGBTI visibility during Gezi opened up new areas for the LGBTI movement to interact with groups and individuals, and it created new opportunities to form solidarity with them (Angelik), so much so that it became a taboo for progressive groups to make homophobic claims, or even not to put LGBTI issues on their agenda (Çiçek). While it used to be only the LGBTI activists who brought up LGBTI issues during social and political platforms before Gezi, individuals from other political groups started organizing events, inviting LGBTI activists to be panellists or speakers, and pointing out the problems of the LGBTI community during events after Gezi (Seda). All this support from other groups resulted in another important improvement for the LGBTI movement, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

*Political Support for the LGBTI Movement & The Entrance into National Politics*

While even large amount of people who were not involved in Gezi acknowledged the LGBTI presence, it was natural for political parties that paid close attention to Gezi to notice the contributions of the LGBTI community to the resistance, as well as the unprecedented support it gained from several other communities. “When individuals, as objects of a knowing gaze, become visible and knowable, they become subjects” (Currier, 2012, p. 6), and as the members of the LGBTI community became visible and knowable, the next crucial strategic move for the movement was to represent themselves as political subjects in national politics. Furthermore, it was also a strategic move for the opposition parties to support LGBTI representation in their parties as they noticed the significant potential of the LGBTI community in politics. They realized that gaining the community’s support would gain them more support as well, so they were eager to put LGBTI issues and the need for equal rights on their agendas. Seda also talked about the LGBTI activists’ entrance into national politics as their own representatives, and she claimed that the improvements in this field were direct results of Gezi:

Think about it, nobody knew us from the Republican People's Party (CHP); we had no part in their party’s developments, we came directly from the outside to positions, even to council member candidacies. Despite all the odds, we entered the lists and then became consultants of mayors in municipalities, and I think the most important reason for that is Gezi. If Gezi had not happened, this would not have happened either.

It seems like this rapid and unexpected LGBTI presence in national politics is similar to what happened in South Africa where the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Party, and the Inkatha Freedom Party in South Africa had to include LGBT rights in their bill of rights in order not to be seen as perpetuating apartheid-era injustices during post-apartheid era (Currier, 2012). Similarly, Turkey’s opposition parties that supported Gezi had to support its constituents as well. That support inevitably had to include opposing the oppressive ideologies of the ruling

party in order to prove the credibility of their views and policies. Just like Seda, Trans Blok also mentioned that it could be expected for the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), to support the LGBTI movement because of the previous solidarity network the LGBTI movement formed with the Kurdish Independence movement; however, it was surprising for CHP to present three LGBTI candidates during the elections considering that it was a party that had previously ignored LGBTI issues. For this reason, she also claimed that it was more important to gain CHP's support because it has the potential to change the views of more people that have stronger prejudices against LGBTI individuals. Perhaps an even more surprising development after Gezi was the fact that even the LGBTI individuals who were the supporters of the ruling conservative party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), formed their own LGBTI group, AK LGBTI. Although the group drew harsh criticism and opposition from many LGBTI groups and organizations because of their support for a political party that has clear homo/transphobic ideologies and policies, the presence of LGBTI activists inside an anti-LGBTI party increased LGBTI visibility even further. Moreover, this formation made it impossible for the AKP to deny LGBTI existence, and it even forced the party to include LGBTI rights in their election campaign. As E-bear suggested, the formation of conservative LGBTI groups, such as AK LGBTI, can be seen as an indicator that the views of the conservatives may also change just like the change that happened in other previously homophobic groups and parties. For these reasons it is important to emphasize the political support the LGBTI movement has gained since the inception of Gezi, and even if the expected change never happens in AKP, Gezi strengthened the LGBTI movement so significantly that it became hard even for the ruling party to put a halt to the developments in the movement. The fact is that some opposition parties presented LGBTI candidates for the municipal assembly in the local elections, created commissions that have been

working on LGBTI issues, hired LGBTI consultants for municipalities, and signed LGBTI-friendly protocols (Çelik, 2014; Etkin Haber Ajansi, 2013; Tahaoğlu, 2014; Tar, 2014). This series of concrete actions signify such significant improvements that it is expected for them to eventually lead to more crucial results and changes for the LGBTI movement.

### *3.5.2 Conclusion*

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, although all previous themes were important developments for the LGBTI movement by themselves, they each contributed to one of the most crucial implications: visibility. According to Currier (2012):

In its early stages of development, a movement attracts new adherents and acquires more resources and political clout on its uphill climb on the tracks. Eventually, the movement reaches a zenith in its visibility at the height of its trajectory (p. 13).

Gezi was not an early stage of development for the LGBTI movement. In fact, all the resources and experiences the LGBTI movement had accumulated before Gezi led to a “zenith” in visibility during Gezi. Considering the improvements this visibility brought to the movement after Gezi suggests that Currier’s observations are accurate for Gezi. To repeat a few of those improvements, a high number of new LGBTI activists joined the movement and created their own organizations, the movement gained significant support and solidarity from other political and non-political groups and individuals, and the movement successfully took the opportunity to represent itself as subjects in national politics. Although this zenith is by no means a conclusion for the movement’s struggles, it is an important door that was unlocked for the first time in the movement’s history, and the path it opened up can lead to many more doors full of unexpected developments in the future. Moreover, it is crucial to mention that this new path is not only full



of opportunities, but also of risks for the LGBTI movement, a fact not many have been discussing. As the LGBTI movement is standing at a very important point in its history, I believe that the risks of post-Gezi should be discussed as well as its opportunities in order for the movement to realistically consider the changing dynamics along the way. For this reason, I have pointed out to these risks from time to time in the previous sections, and I will discuss them a little more in detail in the conclusion chapter of my thesis.

#### **Chapter 4: Conclusion: Opportunities & Risks**

Despite the current political instability in Turkey that has lead some to argue that Gezi was a failure, as the largest public protests in the country's history, they have already influenced several political and social changes. Only by considering the pre and post-Gezi periods of the LGBTI movement can we recognize their impressive influence. Because of its history of resistance, the LGBTI movement had the organizational skills, experienced activists, awareness of intersecting and interlocking systems of oppression, and networks of solidarity during the protests. These qualities enabled community members to mobilize quickly, form new networks with other protesters, raise awareness, and provide tools for basic necessities for all Gezi protesters. Both thanks to the LGBTI movement's accumulation of previous experience, the ability of activists to implement those experiences as strategic moves during and after the protests and also to apply them to Gezi's changing environment, the movement has achieved a great deal in a short time. This success might only have been possible over many years without Gezi.

On the other hand, such big and sudden changes in a social movement always bring along some risks and challenges. Currier (2012) suggests that the choices a social movement makes during times of political opportunity are crucial to a movement's progress or decline. While some choices cause missing opportunities and result in invisibility, right operational (short-term) and/or strategic (long-term) choices can help a movement seize those opportunities. According to Currier, three of the risk categories that a social movement may face are *internal conflicts*, *external crises* and *ignoring political opportunities*, all of which can be observed in the LGBTI movement after Gezi. When political opportunities were intertwined with social and political turmoil, it became more important than ever for the LGBTI movement in Turkey to consider the

risks along with the opportunities of post-Gezi in order to maintain its progress. Because of the significance of this discussion, this chapter is not only a summary of the previous chapters, but also a combination of the previous discussions with some unexpected findings, which open up new discussions. By exploring the strategic and operational decisions the LGBTI movement has or has not made since the inception of Gezi, in conversation with the gay and lesbian liberation movements in the US and in South Africa, I aim to investigate some of the possible opportunities and threats the movement may face in the future.

In this chapter, my positioning both as an LGBTI activist and an outsider researcher comes together and generates a powerful approach to the issue. This position is complex, because while I am intimately familiar with most of the movement's past strategies, as well as some of the current ones, I also have the possibility to observe post-Gezi decisions and examine implications with the empathic distance of an outsider who has not been involved in the process of making those decisions. To present my position as a metaphor, I know almost every item and decoration in a house that I used to live in a short while ago, and I am still able to peek inside its open door from time to time. At the same time, I have been outside the house for a while now, observing it on all of its sides from a distance. Those who live inside the house may not notice the little changes and details that occur from day to day, both because of what they do inside the house and because of external conditions that may have affected it slowly. However, as a visitor I notice those changes and details since I am not a part of their slow process. Such a thorough view of the house may not have been possible if I had never lived inside it, or if I had never gone outside of it. Thus, my observations and explorations as an insider and an outsider will help bring to light some of the opportunities and risks for the LGBTI movement after Gezi. While some of my suggestions may contribute to the seizure of opportunities, some others may help prevent the

negative consequences of internal conflicts and external crises. Although I am confident about the positive outcomes of my positioning, I would also like to acknowledge that it is very likely for me not to know about every decision and/or strategy the LGBTI movement has had since I left Turkey in 2013. The LGBTI community may have already covered some of the discussions, and/or a completely different strategy that I am not aware of may have been adopted in response to the challenges I will bring up in this chapter. I trust that the community will not take such points as the presumptuous view of an outsider, but rather as cautious observations by a comrade who currently resides *outside the house*.

#### *4.1 The Change in National Politics & the LGBTI Movement's Participation*

##### *Opportunities*

The most concrete implication of Gezi is that it ended an era of shaping politics only around the dominant issues and policies in the country (Bürkev, 2013). While exploring the intersectional connection between anti-apartheid and gay and lesbian liberation movements in South Africa, Epprecht (2013) makes an important observation:

Just look closely at the hidden subtext of the narrative: middle-class white people complain about discrimination while enjoying the material benefits of a system of exploitation and human rights abuses against black people. Their lack of attention to the wider injustices in their society meant that the movement for sexual minority rights did not gain credibility among black South Africans for at least two more decades (p. 153)

Epprecht's criticism is about the narrow-minded claims of middle class white homosexuals, but an important parallel can be drawn between that and the complaints of the "White Turks"<sup>1</sup> and some other political parties who participated in the Turkish government's violation of rights. In a similar way, the political parties in Turkey realized after the Gezi protests that their promises for a just society were not believable without an inclusive policy that would deal with all injustices and focus on solving the issues of all oppressed communities. In this sense, the strength of Gezi made it difficult for any party to avoid the needs and demands of millions of minorities whose voices became too loud to ignore after the protests. The LGBTI community was not only one of those minority groups, but it was also among the groups that helped Gezi transform from an environmental demonstration into a collective demand for social justice. In addition to this fact, the community had the support of hundreds of thousands after Gezi. Consequently, several political parties noticed the strength of the LGBTI movement, and they realized that ignoring the presence of the LGBTI community would weaken their claims to create a more equal Turkey, while inclusiveness towards LGBTI issues would make them stronger. For the LGBTI community, the gate to be its own representative in national politics was finally opened.

There is one important fact to mention at this point. Although - and because the members of the community were motivated by different ideologies, the LGBTI movement before Gezi had never sided with any political party in particular; they always tried to maintain a neutral distance. This is not to say that the movement remained passive towards parties when there was an act to criticize or appraise or that no ties were formed when there was an opportunity. Rather, the movement avoided identifying with any specific ideology or political party, although its decentralized, non-hierarchical model could be seen as a tendency towards an anarchist structure.

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<sup>1</sup>"White Turks" here are the well-educated, well-to-do Kemalist elites fashioning themselves on (some of) Atatürk's ideas. They are often associated with state bureaucracy and the military" (Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2013). See *Terminology* for more information.

This strategy was effective at the time, but when important opportunities presented themselves after Gezi, a quick and new strategy had to be adopted. Just like when the activists in South Africa “began rejecting apolitical visibility and developed inclusive visibility strategies allied with antiapartheid organizing” and “adapted their strategies to the changing socio-political field” in the mid 1980s (Currier, 2012, p. 35), the activists in Turkey made a similar strategic decision after Gezi, and they got involved in parties that were eager to work with the LGBTI movement and promised to include LGBTI issues in their agenda. At this point, Currier’s exploration of the South African gay and lesbian liberation movement reveals another parallel with the LGBTI movement in Turkey:

The NCGLE (National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality) presented a moderate and disciplined image of respectable LGBT activism to targeted political parties and state leaders. This normalized visibility meant that LGBT movement organizations did not ask for too much of the state; instead, they worked within rules of post apartheid institutional politics (p. 41).

In the same way, the decision of the activists in Turkey not only helped the movement gain more “normalized” political and social visibility and legitimate its demands for more credibility, but it also positioned LGBTI individuals as their own representatives in the political arena. Alliances with multiple parties also diversified the political goals of the movement, decentering the state as the only institution to target. By running candidates in national and local elections and being hired as advisors of municipalities, LGBTI activists seem to have gained a strong foothold in national politics, which promised more effective changes for the movement in the long run.

### *Risks & Challenges*

Tremendous expansion and the changing dynamics of the LGBTI movement brought out some risks as well as opportunities. Currier (2012) brings together the arguments of several scholars and asserts that:

When an LGBT movement achieves a certain visibility for privileged constituents that resembles normalcy, activists will abandon other transformative political projects.

According to this logic, attaining a certain type of visibility can depoliticize and demobilize LGBT activists. In these queer critiques, visibility is a final result of LGBT activism (as cited in Currier, p.7).

Although this situation can be observed in the U.S. example after the gay liberation movement, as the movement became mainstream, I believe the danger of being depoliticized is less clear for the LGBTI movement in Turkey. There are considerable political and social differences between the cases in the U.S. and in Turkey. In Turkey, where politics define everyday life, it is impossible for minority groups such as the LGBTI community to avoid struggle, and therefore visibility is by no means a final result for the movement, but instead the beginning of new struggles. However, being depoliticized, or “becoming too mainstream” currently seems to be a prevalent fear of the movement in Turkey. Currier (2012) suggests that it is expected for movements to “juggle multiple public presentations for different audiences” for different purposes. Although the sudden change in political positioning and the juggling of different public and political presentations created several opportunities for the LGBTI movement, it also brought along some challenges and *internal conflicts* for a movement that had avoided a forced “moderate and disciplined” presentation for two decades in order not to lose its independence. One of my participants, Seda stated that some of the LGBTI activists who had to present themselves differently in a political party shared very little or no ideological view with the

parties in which they became involved. Some even believed in a completely opposite ideology, but they had to take on that presentation as a pragmatic strategy. However, not all constituents of the LGBTI movement perceived this situation as a strategic move, and so the activists involved in parties started receiving harsh criticism from their comrades for being too mainstream and/or abandoning the principles of the movement. This is not to say that everybody who got involved in political parties were adopting this involvement as a strategy; most likely, some shared or at least sympathised with those parties' principles. Nevertheless, they also became the subjects of criticism. Although I have been trying to follow the discussions in the movement from a distance as best as I could, the extent of this issue did not become clear until I conducted interviews in Istanbul. Seda's observation about this issue is critically import:

There is a serious fear of becoming mainstream in the movement... There is a paranoia that the movement will become mainstream, we will make sacrifices from our identities, and some people will use us [for their own purposes]. For this reason, there is an incredible prejudice against the CHP voters... Unfortunately, people still cannot distinguish between a party and its voters, while CHP voters are also a part of society. If we are trying to raise consciousness among society of course we will try to raise consciousness among the CHP or even AKP voters as well. However, especially after Gezi this topic got seriously inflamed in the movement. There is still no reconciliation about this issue, about how the movement will interact with politics.

Seda suggests that this internal conflict has come to such a dangerous point that not only do those concerned activists equate party voters with the party's ideologies, but they also started perceiving the LGBTI activists involved in certain parties, as well as their organizations, as sharing the same ideological views with those parties. After this revelation, I delved into the issue during my interviews and found out, to my surprise, that although my participants were concerned about the situation, they all refused to use the word "division" when I suggested it. While Seda believed this was an "emotional reaction" because LGBTI individuals are fragile when it comes to their identity politics and the problem lay in not being able to analyze the issue



accurately, Trans Blok interpreted the situation as a “natural development resulting from the fact that the movement grew and expanded.” I believe it is a combination of both. Even though it may be a useful approach that my participants seemed not overly concerned about the issue, this unresolved conflict may have serious unforeseen consequences. To illustrate, Currier (2012) argues that:

*Internal conflicts* [italics in original] can impel activists to develop an inward focus and withdraw from public visibility and external opportunities (p. 91).

Although it is difficult to present a certain argument as to why there were no LGBTI candidates from HDP in the re-running of national elections in November 2015, especially while it is the most sympathetic party to LGBTI issues and the strongest ally of the movement in national politics<sup>1</sup>, I believe that Currier’s observation on withdrawal from external opportunities because of internal focus would be one reasonable explanation. It is a reasonable claim to say that the conflict is a result of the sudden expansion of the movement, and it will take time for the changes to settle in the movement. However, considering that this serious internal conflict may have already created some challenges for the movement, that Trans Blok mentioned that it was not talked about much in the movement, and that Seda suggested the solution would be found by resolving the issues through constructive dialogue, I believe it might be time for the LGBTI movement to refer back to its tradition of close communication among its constituents.

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<sup>1</sup> Because of the strong solidarity between the Kurdish independence and LGBTI movements, the pro-Kurdish HDP is the strongest ally. Based on my observations, this missed opportunity seems to be due to the amount of time and effort the LGBTI movement has been spending on dealing with its internal conflicts.

#### *4.2 Sudden Expansion of the Movement: Bolder & More Diversified LGBTI Activists*

##### *Opportunities*

As I mentioned above, the LGBTI movement was relatively homogenous before Gezi, but the “domino effect” (E-bear) of coming out that Gezi inspired changed the stereotypical view of LGBTI individuals. The members of the community were no longer seen as only belonging to middle or high class with the same or similar ideologies, because the new LGBTI recruits significantly diversified the movement. The strength of this domino effect can best be observed in the case of AK LGBT’s formation. Although the Gezi protests were initially against the AKP government and its restrictive policies, the influence of Gezi was so inclusive and liberating that it not only mobilized the LGBTI protesters, but also embodied the anti-protesters, one of the oppressed constituents of AKP itself: its LGBTI followers. AK LGBT’s formation seems to support Seda’s claim that “there was nobody left untouched by the LGBTI movement in Gezi,” and even outside Gezi.

Although the LGBTI movement had two decades of organizing and resistance experience before the protests, Gezi was a unique experience that added a great amount of new knowledge to that accumulation. According to Hou (2010):

As an umbrella concept for previously disparate areas of activism, “public space activism” is, by default, forging strategic linkages, mobilizing people not otherwise connected with activism, and providing a more accessible and generalized language for advocacy and citizen engagement (p. 231).

The advantages Gezi provided to the LGBTI movement are in accordance with Hou’s claim about the opportunities public space activism offers to its participants: Gezi was a public place where the movement could form those strategic linkages and mobilize a large number of people

who had no connection to the movement previously to be involved in a broader concept of activism. Perhaps most importantly, it helped the movement realize the need for a “more accessible and generalized language for advocacy” (Hou, 2010). Resisting in its political bubble against several institutions for two decades, as Trans Blok put it, the experienced LGBTI activists were “electrified” with the realization that the movement had “become too politicized, retired into its own shell, and got estranged to its own roots.” She continued in her remarks by saying that the movement was either going to risk losing all those new recruits who just met with the movement during Gezi or it was going to adopt a new strategy to win them over. Although the LGBTI movement in Turkey did not have problems due to race exclusion, as GASA and the early lesbian and gay movement in South Africa did, it is facing a similar challenge due to socio-political exclusion. It is interesting that the situation is both similar to, and also completely the opposite from what happened in South Africa; while GASA was apolitical and indifferent to racial issues, the movement in Turkey was too political and so concerned about nationalism, racism and conservatism that it was disconnected from the apolitical, nationalist, and conservative LGBTI crowd. On one hand, the LGBTI movement has always had a close relationship with the Kurdish Independence movement because the Kurds were another oppressed group, and they shared a problem with the state. On the other hand, the “White Turks” had always been the group that was privileged and in power, and their problem with the state as well as their victimization started only after the AKP government propagated anti-Kemalist laws and discourses. As all different backgrounds joined together in Gezi, so did these two completely opposite ideologies, and naturally some of these people were also LGBTI individuals. Fortunately, the movement had enough experience and a tradition of dialogue that helped the community members interact, learn from each other, and find a middle ground that would bring

different constituents of the movement together in Gezi. As the new LGBTI activists started learning why some of their discourses were problematic and discussed the underlying politics, the experienced activists had to start questioning their political language in order to find ways to communicate more constructively and to be more inclusive and accessible to a crowd they had unintentionally avoided for many years. However, it should be noted that this emergence is also one of the factors that created the previously mentioned internal conflict after Gezi; activists' different ideologies and/or involvement in different political parties began to clash. This problem it is also related to the challenge I will discuss in the following section.

### *Risks & Challenges*

My participants interpreted the expansion and diversification of the movement as positive, and I agree with them. When I held the interviews in July 2014, there seemed to be unresolved internal conflicts that were similar to the previous conflict I discussed, and they appeared to have resulted from this sudden expansion and ideological differences within the movement. Although the situation in the South African example, in the case of GASA's collapse, was different than the situation in the LGBTI movement in Turkey, this conflict within the community may cause similar dangerous results if the conflicts turn into divisions in the movement. Adopting a pragmatic approach is a new strategy that the movement began learning during the protests, and it is an approach the community had criticized and refrained from before Gezi. Some LGBTI activists, who had been in the movement before Gezi, seem to be resistant to a pragmatic approach that may mean being involved in a party with "problematic" principles and changing it from the inside because of fears about becoming mainstream and/or abandoning the principles of the LGBTI movement. At the same time, some post-Gezi LGBTI formations that not only emphasize their sexual/gender identity, but also their ideologies seem to be creating a

similar internal conflict. In the end, ideological differences are creating resistance from most constituents, and as I argued above, this inward focus may cause invisibility and/or withdrawal from seizing external opportunities.

To illustrate, Currier (2012) describes *ignoring opportunities*:

Activists may not frame opportunities as such and let them disappear altogether. Activists may not recognize an opportunity in time; if an opportunity is invisible to activists, then a movement organization is likely to be invisible at a time of opportunity (p. 91).

I argue that this situation showed itself in a concrete way in the case of internal discussions the LGBTI movement had regarding the formation of AK LGBT. While some LGBTI activists supported an alliance and interaction with AK LGBT when the group was formed, some other LGBTI activists harshly criticized this pro-government formation because the ideologies the group supported were homophobic/oppressive in their essence and detrimental to the movement. This internal conflict/discussion may have taken too long and the LGBTI movement may have missed an opportunity by not making a strategic move on time, as some activists did not frame this formation as an opportunity. Creating a conversation with AK LGBT and focusing the attention on common needs and demands rather than points of dissent may have integrated this formation into the movement, opening up new discussions and opportunities. At the very least, a strong movement that encompasses the supporters of the government while at the same time criticizing its detrimental ideologies may have put more pressure on the government about some LGBTI issues. Therefore, the possibility of cooperation with AK LGBT might have been one of the strongest opportunities to force the state policies at this point, but so far such a strategy seems not to have been adopted by the movement. It is true that the ideologies of the government are completely opposite of what the LGBTI movement believes. However,

LGBTI activists might keep it in mind that CHP before Gezi had a similar approach to some LGBTI issues, and after the possibility of interaction with the party presented itself, and it was seized as an opportunity by the LGBTI movement, the party's policies started changing drastically, so much so that several municipalities that belong to CHP signed LGBTI-friendly protocols (Çelik, 2014). As was stated by some of my interview participants, this change in CHP had been unimaginable previously. In the same way, AK LGBT might have represented the possibility for an interaction with AKP, and the result might have given birth to new opportunities. Even though the members of the LGBTI movement do not share a uniting public space like Gezi Park anymore, the Gezi experience should stay as a reminder: it is crucial to emphasize solidarity rather than differences, and not all principles and politics of the experienced movement are accessible to all, so the solution may be to juggle different presentations effectively for different purposes while keeping the communication doors open to groups with ideological differences. Having said that, I would also like emphasize once again that I have not been a part of the movement in the post-Gezi period, and therefore I may not be aware of a move made by the movement towards integration of such groups into the movement, and the cause of such a missed opportunity may merely be the result of a resistance from those groups towards the pre-Gezi LGBTI activists and their principles. As my participant Çiçek suggested, learning the constructive ways of doing politics and transforming a movement takes time, and hopefully the lessons the community learned in Gezi will have priceless benefits for a much stronger and united movement in the future.

Another risk that stems from the increased visibility of the LGBTI community can be defined as an *external crisis*. Winnubst (as cited in Currier, 2012) argues that:

People and groups deemed nonnormative by hegemonic institutions may find themselves relegated to invisibility, which symbolizes their structural disadvantage. Paradoxically, invisibility can lead to hyper visibility, a condition in which visible traits become interpreted as excessive in ways that attract the derision and gaze of a privileged group (p. 5).

In the case of the LGBTI community in Turkey, when that marginalized, invisible community suddenly became significantly visible both in social and political areas, the prejudiced who have not experienced Gezi started seeing the “excessive traits” of LGBTI individuals more and more frequently in every day life. Although the movement welcomed the explosion of visibility, there were also concerns about an increased amount of violence against LGBTI individuals that resulted from hyper visibility. Trans Blok described the situation as the “people’s side becoming more clear” and stated that “there is nobody left who is neutral about LGBTI individuals anymore; they either ally with us, or they are against us,” so public opinion seems to have become more polarized. She further remarked that because of increased visibility the scale of homophobia also increased:

While people who only disliked LGBTI individuals before Gezi started verbally attacking them, and those who used to verbally attack LGBTI individuals started physically attacking.

The fact that all of my participants voiced their concern about increases in violence and hate crimes against LGBTI individuals indicates the severity of the situation. Perhaps because this is an external crisis, I do not have any solution, but it is certainly an important finding that should be opened up for further discussion. Similarly, Currier (2012) does not seem to have a concrete suggestion that deals with external crises either:

*External crises* [italics in original] that jeopardize a movement organization's public standing or accomplishments can necessitate immediate reactions from activists so that they can neutralize the resulting damage. Responding to external crises may take time, energy, and resources away from other campaigns (p. 91).

Although the movement takes immediate (re)actions such as organizing protests against hate crimes, constantly trying to raise awareness, and dealing with incidents through legal actions, the safety of LGBTI individuals is not protected by the Turkish state, which reduces the strength of these responses, and requires more time, energy, and resources from the activists. The fact that the current government does not refrain from making provocative statements against LGBTI individuals makes it even more difficult for these immediate reactions to neutralize violence. One can only hope that all the improvements the LGBTI movement has achieved so far will bring legal protections and changes in the constitution regarding hate crimes in the future.

#### *4.3 Conclusion*

Epprecht (2013) draws parallels between Stonewall and the lesbian and gay liberation movement in South Africa and claims that:

Every country has (or will have!) its own Stonewall, an event that galvanizes lgbti into political consciousness and activism in some form or another (p. 151).

Although Gezi might be considered the Stonewall of Turkey for the LGBTI movement in some ways, there is also a significant difference to emphasize: When the name "Stonewall" is pronounced, the beginning of the gay liberation movement in the U.S. comes to mind, but when "Gezi" is mentioned, that beginning points to a series of internal and external changes for many victimized communities in Turkey and about the relationship that was formed between those



communities. In this way, Gezi was a much greater event than Stonewall, or the inception of the gay and lesbian liberation movement in South Africa, so much so that Eliaçık (2013) refers to the protests as “the Gezi Republic” and claims that:

The Gezi Republic they [protesters] founded lasted for 19 days, but it became such a republic that it had the qualities to guide the next 100 years of the Turkish Republic and 1.000 years of the world (p. 195).

These qualities have indeed been guiding the politics and changing the dynamics of various groups that were the founding constituents of the Gezi Republic. Investigating only one of those constituents, the LGBTI movement, and what its community gained from the Gezi experience in only 19 days can act as strong evidence supporting Eliaçık’s argument. By effectively putting its decades long intersectional, non-hierarchical, decentralized politics and internal discussions into practice in Gezi, the LGBTI community did not only contribute to changing the dynamics of its own movement, but others’ as well. Key changes that the argument in this thesis has articulated in terms of cause and effect are as follows:

- 1) The planned and experienced structures of the LGBTI and other experienced movements such as feminist and Kurdish Independence, along with the spontaneous participation of mostly young, previously apolitical protesters initiated a process: *call and response*. This process depended on a dialectical relationship among its components, making the difference between cause and effect indistinct and inseparable from each other.
- 2) The Park provided a space and opportunity for a diverse group of people to get to know each other. Through direct interaction they started to realize that some people were victimized through multiple, linked structures, creating a larger system of oppression, and that monistic approaches to oppression contributed to the continuity of this system.

- 3) The LGBTI community, together with others that shared similar politics, helped raise the awareness of intersecting and interlocking systems of oppression. Through activism in the park they dismantled the sexist, homophobic, and transphobic discourses to a certain extent; the LGBTI movement introduced its decentralized, non-hierarchical, humorous activism style to other groups, and realized its own internal insufficiencies in the process.
- 4) As protesters got to know the LGBTI community in Gezi, their prejudices and opinions regarding LGBTI issues started changing, and LGBTI individuals were normalized.
- 5) This normalization increased support and solidarity for the LGBTI movement in Turkey.
- 6) Increased support for the LGBTI community and awareness of its issues resulted in a visibility explosion for the LGBTI movement, evident in the 2013 Pride march
- 7) This visibility attracted a large number of new LGBTI activists who founded their own groups and organizations throughout the country, and provided the opportunity for the LGBTI community to represent themselves in the political field for the first time.

These points I argued throughout my thesis are a powerful evidence to bear on the sentiment expressed by Eliaçık. To say the very least, the LGBTI movement has a great number of new allies in its struggle to achieve social justice, and although “the Gezi Republic” is over, the experiences it initiated will not easily be removed from the collective memory of its “founders”.

As Shelley’s (1818) famous quotation in *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* states, “nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change” (p. 178). The political and social turmoil of post-Gezi and the *internal conflicts* and the *external crises* the LGBTI movement is facing are the side effects of painful but great sudden changes. This MA thesis project concludes that the inclusive and constructive dialogue experienced by the LGBTI movement, which helped generating the Gezi Spirit, may be a strong tool in dealing with the

*internal conflicts* that may evolve into benefits for the movement, while the negotiation of the *external crises* seems to depend on future political and legal changes in the system. It may seem to some that Gezi was a great but lost opportunity that could have brought those much-needed changes, and that things are far worse now than how they used to be for those who took part in the protests. It is true that post-Gezi presents new and harsh challenges to many groups, but the fact remains that Gezi brought many undisputable social and political changes. Regarding the struggles of post-Gezi, as a drag queen once remarked after the Stonewall riots without even knowing what the riots would become, “we may have lost the battle, sweets, but the war is far from over” (Lisker, 1969).

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